Scope:  All UNM SRMC Members of the Medical Staff

Introduction:

The medical profession, while itself a complex social structure, is an integral part of an even more complex ecosystem. On the one hand, our profession is enclosed within, but with critical links to, the broader societal domain. On the other hand, our profession fully encompasses a broad range of clinical care-giving, lifelong scholarship and the training and education of subsequent generations of physicians.

To date, efforts to improve the quality of health care have been driven by legislative policy (government regulation), financial incentives (behavior modification), public reporting of outcomes (fear) and competition (market-based economics). Unfortunately, the problems of cost and disparities in access to care and quality of care in our health care system loom ever-larger and threaten to further strain, if not collapse, the profession as most of us know it\(^1\). Thus, efforts to strengthen our profession in order to enable it to cope with these challenges must derive from both internal and external interventions. Paramount among the former is ‘professionalism’: a term much used over the past several decades but increasingly important as we attempt to improve and strengthen our system from within.

In 2002, after over a decade of thoughtful effort and impressive collaboration among a number of key stakeholders in our profession, the *Physician Charter on Medical Professionalism*\(^1\) was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. We encourage each and every member of the UNM SRMC Medical Staff, irrespective of discipline or specialty, to read, ponder and assimilate the tenets articulated in this document. While we summarize the core elements of professional behavior and responsibility herein, we encourage a more engaged understanding of these elements. The fundamental tenets in the *Charter* can certainly be used as the basis of a matrix for the qualitative and quantitative assessment of professionalism. More importantly they can serve as a starting point for their embodiment in the unique, culturally-diverse and resource-challenged environment at UNM SRMC.

Before proceeding to the core elements it is imperative to begin with a reminder of fundamental operating principles of the contract of medicine with the society within which the profession functions. To human rights advocates these principles sound familiar; to those of us who remember the Oath of Hippocrates these principles bring us back to that day when we committed to medicine as not only a profession but a way of life. These principles are:

- The principle of the primacy of patient welfare;
- The principle of patient autonomy;

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\(^1\) UNM Sandoval Regional Medical Center
Responsible Department: Medical Staff
Revised: New
• The principle of social justice.

Elements of Professionalism from the Charter on Medical Professionalism

• Commitment to professional competence;
• Commitment to honesty with patients;
• Commitment to patient confidentiality;
• Commitment to maintaining appropriate relations with patients;
• Commitment to improving quality of care;
• Commitment to improving access to care;
• Commitment to a just distribution of finite resources;
• Commitment to scientific knowledge;
• Commitment to maintaining trust by managing conflicts of interest;
• Commitment to professional responsibilities.

Afterword

Clearly, the aforementioned domains of professionalism are generic and allow for more specific categorizations appropriate to the UNM SRMC environment. Note, for example, that the words ‘cultural sensitivity’, “minority” and ‘multi-ethnic’ are not mentioned anywhere in the Charter. Clearly, these domains of professional awareness are facts of everyday life at UNM SRMC. We believe that these domains were intentionally broad to allow for appropriate contextual interpretation and application. Thus, these domains can serve as a starting point for compliance to ‘professional quality and competency assessment’ at UNM SRMC. It must be realized, however, that “…no single method exists for the reliable and valid evaluation of professional behavior.” Nonetheless, this sobering caveat, the defined domains may be further matrixed to allow for institutional-specific evaluation and assessment of not only outliers but, perhaps more importantly, compliers. The many challenges to professionalism – for example, arrogance, greed, or conflicts of interest - must be met not by withdrawing further into defensive silos of uniquely-defined competencies germane to only one discipline, but by fully embracing those connections to societal values, structures and forces within which we operate. It is essential that we focus on the successes and strengths as well as the failures and weaknesses of our professional activities. Recommended guidelines for all Medical Staff at UNM SRMC follow.
Professionalism Guidelines
A Statement from the UNM SRMC Medical Executive Committee

Guidelines for Professionalism in Interpersonal Relationships

- Treat all medical staff, hospital staff, house staff and students, and patients and their family members with courtesy and respect.
- Manage disagreements or disputes with others through collegial attitudes and positive communication, and if necessary through conflict management processes.
- Be mindful of your own well-being, and take positive steps to address excessive stress or fatigue.
- Avoid the following negative actions:
  - abusive language or recurrent sarcasm;
  - sexual harassment or inappropriately sexual comments and behaviors;
  - threats of violence, retribution, litigation, diminished reputation, or financial harm;
  - racial, ethnic, gender-based or religious slurs;
  - foul or profane language, shouting, or rudeness;
  - criticizing colleagues, staff, or students in front of others in the workplace, or in front of patients or their family members;
  - shaming, belittling, or berating others;
  - actions that are reasonably felt by others to represent intimidation;
  - physically or verbally slandering or threatening others;
  - engaging in romantic and/or sexual relationships with patients, their family members, subordinate staff, or students;
  - revealing confidential patient or staff information to those not authorized to receive it;
  - treating patients or advising others about patient care while impaired by alcohol, drugs, or illness;
  - making false, deceptive or fraudulent statements or clinical documentation;
  - using verbal or physical intimidation, even if it is in furtherance of clinical care;
  - imposing excessive or idiosyncratic requirements on others that do not further patient care or clinical education.

Guidelines for Professionalism in Clinical Practice

- Treat patients and their family members with respect and compassion, remaining mindful of the stress and anxiety they are experiencing.
- Do one’s best to provide the best clinical care, and to support others in doing the same.
- Respond promptly and professionally when asked by colleagues to provide appropriate consultation or clinical care.
- Respond promptly and appropriately to patient requests.
- Assist patients and families in times of special need or distress, such as when making end-of-life decisions, and do so without imposing one’s own beliefs or preferences.
- Respect patient privacy and confidentiality.
- Seek and obtain appropriate consultation.
- Arrange for appropriate coverage when not available.
- Prepare and maintain complete and accurate medical records within established time frames.
• Disclose current and potential conflicts of interest and resolve any such conflicts in the best interest of the patient and the institution.
• When terminating or transferring care of a patient, provide complete, appropriate and timely information to the receiving caregiver.
• Maintain professional skills, knowledge, and competence through participation in continuing medical education.

Guidelines for Professionalism in Relationships with the Hospital and Community

• Abide by the rules, regulations, policies, and procedures of the UNM SRMC.
• Address dissatisfaction through appropriate channels, without engaging in negative behaviors that diminish the morale and well-being of one’s self and others.
• Support the institution’s activities by serving on committees and work groups.
• Assist in identification of colleagues who may be professionally impaired and in need of support.
• Actively participate in quality improvement activities, clinical outcome reviews, and quality assurance procedures.
• Hold in confidence all information pertaining to peer review, quality assurance, and quality improvement.
• Assist the institution in achieving and maintaining necessary licensure and accreditation.
• Do not expose the hospital or the medical community to unnecessary liability or risk.
• Be a steward of the institution’s limited resources, managing them efficiently and effectively.

PROCEDURE

Failure of a UMN SRMC practitioner to consistently demonstrate appropriate Medical Professionalism that cannot be remedied through collegial intervention will be subject to Corrective Action as described in the UNM SRMC Medical Staff Bylaws Section 11.

REFERENCES


SRMC School of Medicine “Statement on Professionalism”

Sign & Date