The UNM HSC
Learning Environment Office Presents

Professionalism Behaviors and Expectations for MD Students

Overview

MD students are expected to act professionally in all of their learning environments, including classrooms and clinical spaces. Unprofessional behavior can have serious consequences, such as lower grades, poor patient care, and even in dismissal from the UNM SOM.

Because this is such an important part of MD training, the SOM wanted to ensure that professionalism standards for MD students were updated, clear, and consistent across the insitution.

To that end, the LEO team has worked with many other faculty and leaders to develop a new set of professionalism standards, which are effective immediately. We hope this toolkit will help you understand the standards, get a sense of behaviors that are and are not in line with the standards, and be clear on what happens if those standards are not met.

Introduction

UNM Medical Students are responsible for professional conduct in all activities as outlined in the University of New Mexico HSC Codes of Professionalism and Conduct for students, residents, fellows, staff, and faculty. In addition, UNM medical students are expected to adhere to the following professional behaviors and expectations.

The AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) defines professionalism in medicine as a commitment to excellence, patient welfare, and societal health. It encompasses attributes like altruism, accountability, responsibility, honesty, integrity, and respect for others. We at the UNM SOM honor this definition while recognizing the need to broaden and deepen our understanding of professionals to reflect evolving standards, values, varied lived experiences, and the realities of medical education and patient care.

The concept of “professionalism” has historically been defined through narrow and exclusionary lenses; thus, we shift toward a model of relational accountability, recognizing that our behaviors impact others and that growth as future healthcare professionals requires learning how to navigate conflict, repair harm, uphold trust, and care for those we serve.

We define professionalism as a practice of relational accountability, which is the ongoing responsibility to uphold trust, integrity, and respect within learning, working, and patient-care environments, and communities of care. Professionalism is not a set of fixed traits, but a dynamic and context-driven commitment to the expectations outlined below. Please note, this is not an exhaustive list.

Responsibility and Altruism

- Communicate promptly and respectfully with peers, faculty, team members, and patients and their families.
- Respond promptly to communication from OMSA, UME, course faculty, or clerkship directors, typically within 1-3 business days.
- Ensure all required tasks are completed promptly and to a high standard to support efficient learning and effective patient care.
- Recognize limitations in knowledge, skills and perspective, seek support when needed, and provide support to others when able.
- Contribute to the highest extent of your ability to the care of patients, learners, and team members.
- Demonstrate initiative, sound judgment, and dependability by fulfilling responsibilities and seeking ways to contribute meaningfully in group work, team settings, and classroom and clinical environments.
- Treat your classroom environment as a professional workplace setting, and ensure that you treat peers and teachers as valued colleagues.

Examples of unprofessional behaviors in this area:

- Failing to respond to an important message from leadership within the required timeline
- Misrepresenting your skill(s) while on clerkship (“I don’t need to be supervised, I’ve sutured many patients”).
- Undermining your peers when they are working to learn (“X is so stupid, they didn’t know what furosemide is used for”).

Accountability

- Value and honor the time, work, and care of others in classrooms and clinical environments.
- Demonstrate commitment to ongoing learning and improvement, including professional and academic development.
- Solicit and accept feedback, and commit to a continual growth mindset.
- Take accountability for mistakes, errors, or shortcomings, and recognize opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- Be present and engaged for mandatory activities, classroom sessions, clinical shifts, and other responsibilities.
- Follow designated procedures for reporting absences.
- Do not threaten others with retaliation or retaliate against them for raising concerns about academic, clinical, or professional performance.
- Attend to your physical and emotional well-being, and take accountability for your needs and capacity, particularly with regards to providing patient care.

Examples of unprofessional behaviors in this area:

- Failing to communicate with the relevant group prior to missing a mandatory activity.
- Failing to take ownership of an error (“I don’t know who put the syringe in the trash instead of the sharps”).
- Creating repeated distractions in the learning environment unrelated to the classroom activities.

Honesty and Integrity

- Exhibit honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior in line with the ethical standards of UNM and UNMH in classrooms and clinical environments.
- Give clear, consistent, timely, objective, and respectful feedback in line with curricular expectations.
- Do not falsify or misrepresent your actions or behaviors.
- Abide by other relevant UNM SOM policies, such as those regarding social media use, AI, plagiarism, etc.

Examples of unprofessional behaviors in this area:

- Copying a peer's work on a take home activity.
- Creating an anonymous social media account and posting negatively about patient experiences.
- Lying about an error ("I already rounded on that patient" when you didn't).

Respect for Others

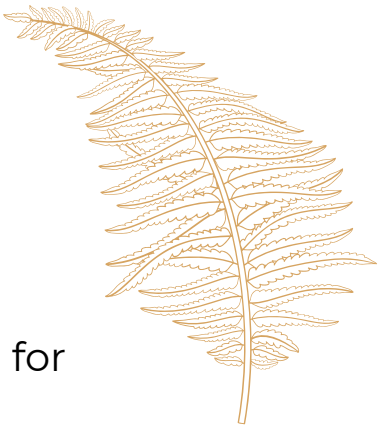
- Exhibit cultural humility and value the lived experiences, needs, and differences of peers, teachers, care team members, patients, and families.
- Center the dignity of colleagues, peers, learners, patients, and others.
- Treat all others with respect, compassion, and empathy.
- Honor and respect the boundaries, privacy, and wellbeing of others including peers, faculty, staff, and patients.
- Work effectively with diverse, mixed, and interprofessional teams in classrooms and clinical environments, and utilize effective, professional strategies for resolving conflicts as they arise.
- Contribute to creating and maintaining respectful, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.
- Honor the “basic assumption” in providing feedback: everyone is intelligent , has a unique point of view and cares about doing their best.

Examples of unprofessional behaviors in this area:

- Gossiping about a colleague’s health status.
- Speaking about an alternate service in a negative way (“our phlebotomists never manage to get labs on time”).
- Speaking about patients in pejorative ways (“drug-seeking” patient).

Privacy and Confidentiality

- Value, respect, and uphold the confidentiality and privacy of all patients, including but not limited to HIPAA requirements
- Report promptly (typically within 1-3 business days) to the appropriate University office lapses in patient care or professionalism, such as patient safety incidents, sexual harassment, or mistreatment concerns.
- Do not disclose private information about peers, teachers, or others in the learning environment, such as disabilities, diagnoses, or other private information.



Examples of unprofessional behaviors in this area:

- Accessing patient data to get contact information for personal reasons.
- Disclosing a peer's disability diagnosis to others without their permission.
- Disclosing private information about a patient to a friend not part of the medical team.

Raising Concerns about Unprofessional Behavior(s)

The UNM SOM ensures that medical students, faculty, and residents can report observed incidents of unprofessional behavior or concerns with the learning environment through multiple procedures coordinated by the UNM HSC Learning Environment Office (LEO), and that all such allegations can be made and investigated without fear of retaliation. The SOM provides several accessible and confidential reporting options. LEO is the primary body responsible for soliciting, collecting, and responding to reports of mistreatment and unprofessional behavior. Reports may be made in any of the following ways:

- **Online Mistreatment Reporting Form** – Available to all members of the UNM community, including students, residents, fellows, faculty, and staff. Reports may be submitted anonymously or with contact information, and can describe incidents personally experienced, witnessed, or heard about. All online submissions go directly to LEO.

- **Direct Report to a LEO Team Member** – Any member of the SOM community may request to meet in person, by phone, or via Zoom with a LEO staff member for a confidential intake conversation. This option is not anonymous and may be used to report incidents experienced, witnessed, or heard about.

- **Course or Clerkship Evaluations** – Available to medical students and always anonymous. Evaluations include the definition of mistreatment and a statement describing how LEO reviews, tracks, and acts on comments when there is sufficient actionable information. Concerns involving protected classes are referred to the UNM Office of Compliance, Ethics, and Equal Opportunity (CEEO), in line with policy.

- **Trusted Mentor or Faculty Member** – Students and residents may choose to report to Learning Community mentors, clerkship directors, deans, or program directors. Faculty who receive such reports are encouraged to forward them to LEO so the standard response process can be engaged.

What happens if these standards are not met?

While professionalism is a learned skill, and thus occasional lapses or errors are human, in situations where unprofessional behaviors are recurring (more than two instances) or harming patients, peers, or learning/working environments, these behaviors may negatively impact your grade, course credit, and/or academic progress, even if all other requirements are met. A pattern of unprofessional behavior that has not responded to feedback may result in a referral to the Committee on Student Promotion and Evaluation (CSPE) or other relevant committee for appropriate response, up to and including dismissal and/or termination.

Any of the following behaviors are considered **severe** and will result in a failing grade and may warrant immediate referral to the Committee on Student Promotion and Evaluation (CSPE):

- A student acts in an unprofessional way that knowingly will, or has the potential to, harm a patient or anyone in the learning or working environment.
- Unprofessional behavior that is not remediated after appropriate interventions

For medical students, repeated lapses in professionalism may be communicated in the MSPE in the following ways:

- Description of professionalism concern in clerkship narrative summary.
- Description of action taken by CSPE after a professionalism referral.