

SS5.1

Professionalism and Ethics

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Professionalism Teaching – from Medical School to the Hospital

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The goal of medical education is to nurture the development of doctors with the professional attributes required for quality patient care. It requires the physician to serve the interests of the patient above his or her self-interest. Professionalism aspires to altruism, accountability, excellence, duty, service, honour, integrity and respect for others.

Cultivating professionalism, which may be dated back to the Code of Hammurabi (2,000 B.C.), is an important aspect of medical education. Much of this is to do with the high expectation that patients and the society have on the physician, but professionalism has been found to be associated with improved medical outcomes. Besides, the tenets of professionalism, focusing on desirable attributes to instil in practitioners, have been purposely devised strategies to reinvigorate medicine and increase public credibility.

A medical ethics and professionalism curriculum is most likely to result in sustained changes in reasoning and behaviour when it is longitudinal, such that early educational interventions are reinforced or advanced by subsequent exposures. Professionalism teaching begins in the undergraduate years and continues during resident and specialist training and beyond. It requires institutional leaders to authentically and publicly support such curriculum, with its cognitive base being taught explicitly. Learning environments and the expertise of faculty members, many of whom should be highly respected colleagues, should align with the institution's mission statement and professionalism precepts. Finally, a multitude of teaching and assessment pedagogies employed with particular emphasis should be placed on learning in the clinical setting, drawing on real day to day examples.