



The American College of Surgeons

Code of Professional Conduct

ACS Task Force on Professionalism

Professionalism serves as the basis of the social contract between medicine and the society that it serves. It therefore is incumbent upon the American College of Surgeons to ensure that its members are aware of the nature of professionalism and are encouraged to incorporate its guiding principles into day-to-day practice.

Several groups, including the American Medical Association¹ and the Council of Medical Specialty Societies² have addressed professionalism and we support their declarations. The “Charter of Medical Professionalism,” developed by the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation, the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine, and the European Federation of Internal Medicine,³ has been endorsed by the Board of Regents of the American College of Surgeons. Through this Code of Professional Conduct we re-examine professionalism from the perspective of surgery, believing that conscientious examination of its complex and evolving issues can promote a healthy construct within which we can practice our privileged profession.

As Fellows of the American College of Surgeons, we treasure the trust that our patients have placed in us because trust is integral to the practice of surgery. During the continuum of pre-, intra-, and postoperative care we accept responsibilities to:

- Serve as effective advocates for our patients’ needs;

- Disclose therapeutic options including their risks and benefits;
- Disclose and resolve any conflict of interest that might influence the decisions of care;
- Be sensitive and respectful of patients, understanding their vulnerability during the perioperative period;
- Fully disclose adverse events and medical errors;
- Acknowledge patients’ psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual needs;
- Encompass within our surgical care the special needs of terminally ill patients;
- Acknowledge and support the needs of patients’ families; and
- Respect the knowledge, dignity, and perspective of other healthcare professionals.

Our profession is also accountable to our communities and to society. In return for their trust, as Fellows of the American College of Surgeons, we accept responsibilities to:

- Provide the highest quality of surgical care;
- Abide by the values of honesty, confidentiality, and altruism;
- Participate in lifelong learning;

- Maintain competence throughout our surgical careers;
- Participate in self regulation by setting, maintaining, and enforcing practice standards;
- Improve care by evaluating its processes and outcomes;
- Inform the public on subjects within our expertise;
- Advocate strategies to improve individual and public health by communicating with government, healthcare organizations, and industry;
- Work with society to establish a just, effective, and efficient distribution of healthcare resources;
- Provide necessary surgical care without regard to gender, race, disability, religion, social status, or ability to pay; and

- Participate in educational programs addressing professionalism.

We, as surgeons, acknowledge that we relate to our patients when they are most vulnerable. Their trust, and the privileges we enjoy, depend on our individual and collective participation in ways that promote the good of both our patients and society. As Fellows of the American College of Surgeons we commit ourselves and the College to the ideal of professionalism.

REFERENCES

1. American Medical Association. Declaration of professional responsibility 2001. View at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/upload/mm/369/decofprofessional.pdf>, Accessed February, 2003.
2. Council of Medical Specialty Societies. Ethics statement. Chicago: Council of Medical Specialty Societies, 1999. View at <http://www.cmss.org/print.cfm?itemid=1100>, Accessed February 18, 2003.
3. Medical Professionalism Project. Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physician charter. *J Am Coll Surg* 2003; 196: 115–118.