

## Definitions of Professionalism - Medical Organizations

### American Board of Internal Medicine

Project Professionalism, 1999 (revised)

*'Professionalism in medicine 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. The elements of professionalism required of candidates seeking certification and recertification from the ABIM encompass: commitment to the highest standards of excellence in the practice of medicine and in the generation and dissemination of knowledge, a commitment to sustain the interests and welfare of patients, a commitment to be responsive to the health needs of society. These elements are further defined as:*

*Altruism is the essence of professionalism. The best interest of the patients, not self-interest is the rule.*

*Accountability is required at many levels – individual patients, society, and the profession. Physicians are accountable to their patients for fulfilling the implied contract governing the patient/physician relationship. They are also accountable to society for addressing the health needs of the public and to their profession for adhering to medicine's time-honoured ethical precepts.*

*Excellence entails a conscientious effort to exceed ordinary expectations and to make a commitment to life-long learning. Commitment to excellence is an acknowledged goal for all physicians.*

*Duty is the free acceptance of a commitment to service. As commitment it entails being available and responsive when 'on call', accepting inconvenience to meet the needs of one's patients, enduring unavoidable risks to one's self when a patient's welfare is at stake, advocating the best possible care regardless of the ability to pay, seeking active roles in professional organizations, and volunteering one's skills and expertise for the welfare of the community.*

*Honour and integrity are the consistent regard for the highest standards of behaviour and the refusal to violate one's personal and professional codes. Honour and integrity imply being fair, being truthful, keeping one's word, meeting commitments, and being straightforward. They also require recognition of the possibility of conflict of interest and avoidance of relationships that allow personal gain to supercede the best interests of the patient.*

*Respect for others (patients and their families, other physicians and professional colleagues such as nurses, medical students, residents, subspecialty fellows and self) is the essence of humanism and humanism is both central to professionalism and fundamental to enhancing collegiality amongst physicians.'*

### Association of American Medical Colleges

The AAMC uses [Swick](#)'s list of attributes as its working definition.

## **Canadian Medical Association**

Series of Health Care. Discussion papers : Professionalism in Medicine.

*'Profession: A self-disciplined group of individuals who hold themselves out to the public as possessing a special skill derived from training or education, and who are prepared to exercise that skill primarily in the interests of others.'*

*'The core of every profession contains two elements: possession of a specialized body of knowledge and a commitment to service... Self-regulation is granted to those who have specialized knowledge because that knowledge is not readily available to the rest of society, and the professional is best able to determine for society how the knowledge should or should not be used. Autonomy is given on the understanding that professionals will devote themselves to serving the best interests of society and will self-regulate to maintain high quality service. Finally, professions must have agreed-upon values and a code of ethics, in the case of medicine in order that the professional role may support that of the healer.'*

*'Effacement of self-interest is the distinguishing feature of a true profession that sets it apart from other occupations. It is the heart of the professing of medicine, i.e., the public declaration and promise that physicians can be trusted to use their skills for something other than their own benefit.'*

*'Professionalism: The term professionalism is used to describe those skills, attitudes and behaviours which we have come to expect from individuals during the practice of their profession and includes concepts such as maintenance of competence, ethical behaviour, integrity, honesty, altruism, service to others, adherence to professional codes, justice, respect for others, self-regulation, etc.'*

*'Professional: Very briefly, a professional is a person who belongs to a group (a profession) which possesses specialized knowledge, skills and attitudes which have been obtained after a long period of study and which are used to benefit other members of society.'*

## **Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada**

'Professional Role Document'

*'A professional is a person who belongs to a group (a profession) which possesses specialized knowledge, skills, and attitudes which have been obtained after a long period of study and which are used to benefit other members of society. The term professionalism is used to describe those skills, attitudes and behaviours which we have come to expect from individuals during the practice of their profession and includes such concepts as maintenance of competence, ethical behaviour, integrity, honesty, altruism, service to others, adherence to professional codes, justice, respect for others, self-regulation, etc.'*