A look at professionalism

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What is the meaning of professionalism? How has it evolved? I would opine that professionalism is a set of values, behaviors and relationships underpinning the trust that the public has for doctors. Building and maintaining trust is the most important aim of professionalism. Our role must be defined by what is in the best interest of our patients as well as society. We must be capable of taking the ultimate responsibility for all decisions in situations of clinical uncertainty and complexity by drawing on our scientific knowledge and acute clinical judgment. Our role as clinicians continues to evolve alongside concepts of professionalism. This evolution is driven by changes in the practice of dentistry in regard to skills, discoveries and technology, as well as a more multidisciplinary approach to health-care delivery. It is also reflective of society’s consensus of what is expected and demanded from each of us.

Professionalism has several vital elements: (a) advocating a desire to improve what clinicians do; (b) accepting change as an asset rather than a threat; (c) using different approaches to develop and improve the core body of knowledge and skill for improving care and to build formal evidence-based development; (d) accentuating the importance of working in multidisciplinary teams across organizational boundaries; (e) committing to expand the quality of patient care; (f) placing stronger organizational boundaries; (g) accepting change as an asset to improve what clinicians do; (h) assuming a strong sense of responsibility for the outcomes of care and for the quality improvement faculty to the new model of professionalism presented.

Further reinforcement for this model lies in the urgent need, due to the stringent financial conditions, for improved efficiency and productivity. It is widely acknowledged that to achieve this will require clinical leadership by those who understand quality improvement. Cameron (2010) pointed out that this renewed focus on clinicians developing and actively altering the services they provide will ensure better patient care and will lead to a new facet of the compact between the public and clinicians that centers on the nature of professionalism.

This does not detract from the doctor-patient relationship but rather is intended to help clinicians achieve a one-to-one interaction. The public health community has recognized the importance of influencing the environment and improving quality assurance for many years, but now it must be expanded as a core body of knowledge and skill for all clinicians.

The importance of quality improvement training and making it a part of everyday delivery of health care requires training commencing from the undergraduate dental school level on up. According to Friedson (1986), professional norms are adopted from role models in the workplace. Unfortunately, many senior clinicians are less familiar with the science of quality improvement and, ultimately, unprepared to teach it; this is a challenge. The transmission of knowledge relies upon the traditional gradient of senior to junior. This hierarchy of knowledge regarding quality improvement as a core of the concept of professionalism may best be dispersed via formal and informal networks, online and off. This concentration of knowledge and its application is required to extend beyond the traditional concepts of professionalism to include all aspects of dentistry and dental organizations.

Health care and its changing world are complex and often intimidating for resolute professional norms. Clinicians are encouraged to become actively involved in service improvement as part of their professional identity and responsibility; commitment to improving quality in health care is no longer a choice — it is a core value of professionalism.

This editorial was inspired by an article from Stanton, E., Lemer, C., and Marshall, M. (2011). Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 104:48-49.

References


Corrections

Ortho Tribune strives to maintain the utmost accuracy in its news and clinical reports. If you find a factual error or content that requires clarification, please report the details to Managing Editor Kristine Kolker at k.kolker@dental-tribune.com.

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