

ACCP STUDENT COMMENTARY

Tenets of Professionalism for Pharmacy Students

American College of Clinical Pharmacy

Key Words: pharmacy students, professionalism, clinical pharmacy.
(*Pharmacotherapy* 2009;29(6):757–759)

Professionalism within health care is an age-old concept from the time of Hippocrates. Professionalism is defined as “the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession.”¹ A profession is considered a group of people who provide a significantly recognized service central to human values that cannot be provided by the average layperson.² Because of their service to society, professionals receive benefits, special recognition, and greater autonomy than nonprofessionals. However, along with the benefits and autonomy professionals enjoy, greater expectations and a higher degree of trust are demanded by society. Societal expectations include discretionary use of professional abilities to assist those without such knowledge, use of professional judgment, volunteerism, and altruism.²

Within pharmacy, professionalism should include the full breadth of skills required to be a competent pharmacy practitioner. Pharmacy students do not become professionals merely by graduating from pharmacy school. Instead, being a professional requires a lifelong commitment to the patients and the societies one serves. A previously described simple way to conceptualize professionalism is by envisioning a bicycle wheel²: the hub of the wheel is a core set of values that includes altruism or service, caring, honor, integrity, and duty; the spokes of the wheel are behaviors demonstrated by an

individual, such as respect, accountability, empathy, and compassion; the tire, which links all qualities of professionalism, includes dressing professionally, being punctual, acting courteously, and other aspects of professional comportment. Although this analogy is useful in understanding the many facets of professionalism, it must be remembered that the hub of this wheel is the most important part of professionalism—without core values that focus on the welfare of the patient, the remainder of the wheel will lack substance.

Acquiring knowledge and competence as a pharmacy practitioner is an essential component of a student’s education during pharmacy school, yet developing professional attitudes and behaviors is just as critical to delivering quality patient care. To introduce students to and remind them of the responsibilities and commitments of a pharmacist, pharmacy schools include the “Oath of a Pharmacist” at white-coat ceremonies and during graduation; however, words may sometimes miss their mark and thus fail to achieve the outcomes required to build and characterize professionalism.³ The development of student professionalism is influenced by role models (faculty, preceptors, residents, and other students), practice environments, and a clear understanding of institutional expectations.⁴ Nevertheless, pharmacy students should not rely solely on faculty and schools to transform them into professionals. Students can help themselves and their peers become pharmacy professionals by their actions in the classroom, at experiential sites, through volunteerism, and through organizational activities. Pharmacy students are responsible for creating a culture within their schools that fosters the development of professionalism and ultimately benefits the patients and societies they serve.

The pharmacy professional is continually

This commentary was prepared by the 2008 ACCP National StuNet Advisory Committee: Shannon L. Holt, Chair; Michelle S. Lau; Frances L. Wong; Russell T. Attridge; Michelle Ho; Jessica L. Morris; Edwin D. Rutledge; Matthew M. Sapko; Xiao Tu; and Tara B. Vlasimsky. Received by the ACCP Board of Regents on October 17, 2008.

Address reprint requests to the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, 13000 West 87th Street Parkway, Lenexa, KS 66215; e-mail: accp@accp.com; or download from <http://www.accp.com>.

evolving to improve patient care through the expanding practice of clinical pharmacy. To uphold the ideals of the profession, students must achieve competency in core clinical knowledge and skills, and develop and maintain professional attitudes and behaviors.^{3, 5} The American College of Clinical Pharmacy National StuNet Advisory Committee has developed the "Tenets of Professionalism for Pharmacy Students," which outlines the essential attitudes and behaviors that signify professionalism and that should be developed and practiced by all students. This report complements other published documents²⁻⁷ but is unique in focusing solely on student professionalism. The following tenets reinforce the expectations that the health care system and patients hold for pharmacy students, as well as the expectations of the schools of pharmacy and the profession at large in educating and molding future practitioners. The tenets are provided as a guide for students to evaluate their personal and professional development throughout their coursework, professional activities, and advanced practice experiences as they transition into practicing members of the pharmacy profession. By incorporating these tenets into both their personal and professional lives, students can begin to develop the lifelong professional behaviors and attitudes expected of members of the profession and by the patients they serve.

The Tenets

Altruism

Make an unselfish commitment to serve the best interests of the patient above your own...

Pharmacy students must recognize that the patient is the top priority in all health care decisions. The patient's well-being should come before anything else, such as ability to pay, managerial opinions, or self-interests. At times, students may find themselves conflicted with competing responsibilities that stand in the way of serving the patient. For example, one may be working in a pharmacy or participating in medical rounds during clerkships and be too busy to provide the patient with the educational information that he or she is seeking. In such situations, it is important to give unselfishly of one's time and service, placing what is in the best interest of the patient above anything else. Students must actively listen, be patient, and be compassionate when interacting with patients to

establish and maintain mutual trust. By understanding individual patient needs, using pharmacotherapeutic knowledge, and evaluating interventions, pharmacy students can contribute to therapies that maintain or improve a patient's quality of life.

Honesty and Integrity

Display honesty and integrity in all that you do...

Professional pharmacy students are responsible for their actions in all settings. Proper classroom behavior and personal integrity maintain academic honesty in the classroom. Preserving patient confidentiality can uphold professional integrity in experiential settings. During the course of pharmacy school, students will likely encounter compromising situations that challenge moral character. Whether these situations involve academics, patient privacy, or unprofessional behavior, it is wise to remember to treat each situation with proper candor. It takes courage to stand up for what is right, and the easy solution is not always the correct one. Always acting with strong ethical conduct guides pharmacy students to maintain the highest standards of professionalism while in school and eventually as professionals in practice.

Respect for Others

Treat others as you would want to be treated...

Every human being deserves to be treated with respect. In simple terms, respect for others means holding high regard for others' feelings, needs, thoughts, and opinions. Respecting others is an essential part of professionalism.⁴ Pharmacy students should consistently demonstrate respect for others, whether they are patients, peers, faculty, preceptors, or other health care providers. When interacting with patients, students should demonstrate empathy, compassion, and respect for the patient's privacy. In addition, when working with other health care providers in a collaborative environment, pharmacy students should value others' opinions and recommendations, listen attentively to others without judgment, and solicit constructive feedback. By displaying respect for others, as well as other professional traits such as integrity and compassion, students can create harmonious relationships with those they serve. These professional traits are vital in providing optimal patient care in today's health care environments.

Professional Presence

Instill trust through professional presence...

Pharmacy students must conduct themselves in a professional manner in both professional and personal settings. Students have an obligation to establish trusting relationships with patients, peers, and other health care providers. Therefore, a professional attitude and appearance should be maintained in any setting where one represents the pharmacy profession. An enthusiastic attitude and personal commitment to the profession demonstrate important aspects of professionalism and can positively influence colleagues and patients. Students should strive to be professionals whom patients find approachable and should communicate in a manner that is understandable and places the patient at ease. In all professional practice environments, students must dress and carry themselves in a way that will instill confidence and trust with patients and health care colleagues; for example, one should always wear a clean, pressed white coat and business attire.

Professional Stewardship

Actively participate and engage in school, organizations, and other worthwhile endeavors in the profession of pharmacy...

The power of active participation both inside and outside the classroom will help students develop as future pharmacists and as individuals. Pharmacy students can be engaged at the local, state, and national levels through established organizations and begin taking on challenges to contribute positively to the profession. For example, students can team up with others from their school to inform the public about the profession and join local and national pharmacy organizations to help ensure the adoption of progressive pharmacy legislation. To continue their efforts to advance within the profession, students should participate in national conferences not just by attending, but also by presenting research, engaging in committee service, and assuming other volunteer roles within organizations. Leadership can be defined in many ways, but ultimately, leaders strive to improve themselves and those around them by motivating people and stimulating beneficial changes. Pharmacy students can help one

another develop leadership skills and learn to be role models for patients, as well as for other health care providers; they must lead by example for their community, the profession, and themselves.

Dedication and Commitment to Excellence

Strive for excellence and assume responsibility for your learning and professional development...

Pharmacy students must acquire the core knowledge and skills of the profession. In the academic environment, individuals must accept and embrace ultimate responsibility for their learning and self-development. Outside the classroom, self-improvement through continuous professional development is essential to the profession. With modern medicine advancing at an exponential rate, pharmacy students should aspire to be lifelong learners constantly seeking to improve their knowledge and skills. They should stay current with changes in the profession, which may include updated practice guidelines, new pharmacotherapeutic agents or approaches, emerging technologies, and new state and federal legislation. Excellence should be sought not only in the classroom and during clerkships, but also beyond graduation in the pursuit of residency training, specialty certification, and practice. Finally, students must remain proactive and continue to seek guidance and mentoring to achieve the goal of excellence.

References

1. Merriam-Webster Online. Professionalism. Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2008. Available from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/professionalism>. Accessed September 22, 2008.
2. Hammer DP, Berger BA, Beardsley RS, et al. Student professionalism. *Am J Pharm Educ* 2003;67:1-29.
3. American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy-American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans Task Force on Professionalism. White paper on pharmacy student professionalism. *J Am Pharm Assoc* 2000;40:96-102.
4. Hammer DP. Professional attitudes and behaviors: the "A's and B's" of professionalism. *Am J Pharm Educ* 2000;64:455-64.
5. American College of Clinical Pharmacy. Core values and mission: the strategic plan of the ACCP, July 25, 2007. Available from http://accp.com/docs/about/ACCP_Strategic_Plan.pdf. Accessed September 30, 2008.
6. American Board of Internal Medicine. Project professionalism, 2001. Available from <http://www.abim.org/pdf/publications/professionalism.pdf>. Accessed September 22, 2008.
7. American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. ASHP statement on professionalism. *Am J Health Syst Pharm* 2008;65:172-4.