

Supplemental Digital Appendix 1

Excerpts of Selected Efforts to Define Professionalism

The following are a few prominent efforts to define professionalism and related words (profession, professional) and also to operationalize medical professionalism (i.e., to say what it entails to be a medical professional). Note that older definitions tend to be more narrative, even poetic, while it is very common for recent work on medical professionalism to proceed directly to operational matters without offering a specific definition of professionalism, *per se*. In other words, many recent “definitions” of professionalism comprise the listing of a set of values and behaviors the authors believe should characterize members of the profession. This implicitly equates the meaning of the term “professionalism” with a set of desired actions and values of professionals, or with a listing of professional standards.

Selected Classic Definitions (by date of reference, oldest first)

Justice Louis Brandeis¹

“A profession is an occupation for which the necessary preliminary training is intellectual in character, involving knowledge and to some extent learning, as distinguished from mere skill; which is pursued largely for others, and not merely for one’s own self; and in which financial success is not the accepted measure of success.”

Carr-Saunders and Wilson²

“[T]he term profession stands for ... a complex of characteristics ... [including] prolonged and specialized intellectual training ... a technique which enables them to render a specialized service to the community ... fixed remuneration ... a sense of responsibility for the competence and

honour of the practitioners as a whole ... they build up associations [with] machinery for imposing tests of competence and enforcing the observation of certain standards of conduct... material considerations of income and status are not neglected, but the distinguishing and overruling characteristic is the possession of a technique. It is the existence of specialized intellectual techniques, acquired as the result of prolonged training, which gives rise to professionalism and accounts for its peculiar features.”

Roscoe Pound³

“A profession is a group of men pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of public service, no less a public service because it may incidentally be a means of livelihood.”

Everett C. Hughes⁴

“Professions are those occupations in which *caveat emptor* cannot be allowed to prevail ... [and in which] the relation of the professional with the client is part of some larger complex of relations.”

Herbert Swick⁵

“...professionalism consists of those behaviors by which we - as physicians - demonstrate that we are worthy of the trust bestowed on us by our patients and the public, because we are working for the patient’s and the public’s good.” The author then lists nine behaviors that, he asserts, constitute medical professionalism (For example, "Physicians subordinate their own interests to the interests of others.").

Eliot Friedson⁶

“[P]rofessionalism is a set of institutions which permit members of an occupation to make a living while controlling their own work.”

Oxford English Dictionary, used by the Royal College of Physicians⁷

“[A profession is] An occupation whose core element is work based upon the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills. It is a vocation in which knowledge of some department of science or learning or the practice of an art founded upon it is used in the service of others. Its members profess a commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their domain. These commitments form the basis of a social contract between a profession and society, which in return grants the profession the right to autonomy in practice and the privilege of self-regulation. Professions and their members are accountable to those serviced and to society.”

Jordan J. Cohen⁸

“Professionalism can be defined for all time as the means by which individual doctors fulfill the medical profession’s contract with society.”

United States Labor Management Relations Act: A “professional employee” is “engaged in work predominantly intellectual and varied in character as opposed to routine, mental, manual, mechanical or physical work, or involving consistent exercise of discretion and judgment in his performance.” (29 USCS § 152)

Selected Recent Efforts Focusing on Operationalizing Professionalism

ACGME Core Competencies in Professionalism⁹

Professionalism

Residents must demonstrate a commitment to carrying out professional responsibilities and an adherence to ethical principles. Residents are expected to demonstrate:

IV.A.5.e).(1) compassion, integrity, and respect for others;

IV.A.5.e).(2) responsiveness to patient needs that supersedes self interest;

IV.A.5.e).(3) respect for patient privacy and autonomy;

IV.A.5.e).(4) accountability to patients, society and the profession; and,

IV.A.5.e).(5) sensitivity and responsiveness to a diverse patient population, including but not limited to diversity in gender, age, culture, race, religion, disabilities, and sexual orientation.

American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation Project Professionalism¹⁰

In this project a subcommittee defined the “core of professionalism as constituting those attitudes and behavior that serve to maintain patient interest above physician self-interest.” The group then listed the following attitudes and behaviors: altruism, accountability, excellence, duty, service, honor, integrity, and respect for others.

Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) Professionalism requirement¹¹

(MS-31-A) Medical schools must ensure that the learning environment for medical students promotes the development of explicit and appropriate professional attributes (attitudes, behaviors, and identity) in their medical students.

... As part of their formal training, students should learn the importance of demonstrating the attributes (attitudes, behavior, professional identity) of a professional and understand the balance of privileges and obligations that the public and the profession expect of a medical doctor.

American Association of Medical Colleges and the National Board of Medical Examiners¹²

The first stated objective of the report from this group was to define “the scope and components of professionalism” and the authors developed 8 “Professionalism Categories:” altruism, honor and integrity, caring and compassion, respect, responsibility, accountability, excellence and scholarship, and leadership.

The Professionalism Charter¹³

“Professionalism is the basis of medicine's contract with society.” It is defined by 3 fundamental principles (obligations related to patient welfare, patient autonomy and social justice) and 10 commitments (professional competence; honesty with patients; patient confidentiality; maintaining appropriate relations with patients; improving quality of care; improving access to care; just distribution of finite resources; scientific knowledge; managing conflicts of interest; and to professional responsibilities).

Wynia, Latham, Kao, Berg and Emanuel¹⁴

“Three core elements of professionalism, each different in nature, are necessary for it to work properly. First, professionalism requires a moral commitment to the ethic of medical service, which we will call devotion to medical service and its values. This devotion leads naturally to a public, normative act: public profession of this ethic. Public profession of the ethic serves both to maintain professionals' devotion to medical service and to assert its values in societal discussions. These discussions lead naturally to engagement in a political process of negotiation, in which professionals advocate for health care values in the context of other important, perhaps competing, societal values.”

A few more definitions, by author in alphabetical order ...

Canadian Medical Association¹⁵

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.

Creuss and Creuss¹⁶

Profession: An occupation whose core element is work based upon the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills. It is a vocation in which knowledge of some department of science or learning or the practice of an art founded upon it is used in the service of others. Its members are governed by codes of ethics and profess a commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their domain. These commitments form the basis of a social contract between a profession and society, which in return grants the profession a monopoly over the use of its knowledge base, the right to considerable autonomy in practice and the privilege of self-regulation. Professions and their members are accountable to those served and to society.

Jackson¹⁷

“[Professions are] a special type of occupation...(possessing) corporate solidarity...prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge, and a collectivity or service orientation...a vocational sub-culture which comprises implicit codes of behaviour, generates an esprit de corps among members of the same profession, and ensures them certain occupational advantages... (also) bureaucratic structures and monopolistic privileges to perform certain types of work... professional literature, legislation, etc.”

Starr¹⁸

“A profession, sociologists have suggested, is an occupation that regulates itself through systematic, required training and collegial discipline; that has a base in technical specialized knowledge, and that has a service rather than a profit orientation, enshrined in its code of ethics.”

Sullivan¹⁹

“Professions are typically described as occupations characterized by three features specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired by formal education and apprenticeship, public recognition of a certain autonomy on the part of the community of practitioners to regulate their own standards of practice, and a commitment to provide service to the public which goes beyond the economic welfare of the practitioners.”

Wynia²⁰

(Excerpted with minor edits) Professionalism, like other “-isms” (consumerism, humanism, egotism, Catholicism, and the like), is a *belief system*. Specifically, professionalism can best be understood as an ideology declaring an important role for professions and professionals in

organizing and delivering certain goods and services in society. The word *professional* provides some insights into this ideology. To profess, from the Latin *pro-fate-ri*, means to speak forth or “to declare aloud or publicly.” A profession, then, is a group of individuals speaking out, together, to declare and make public the shared values and standards that govern their work. A professional is a member of this group and professional actions are those that are in conformance with the shared and declared standards and values of the group. These standards are usually articulated in such public documents as codes of ethics, which aim to create an explicit covenant of trust between professionals, their clients, and society. The particular ideology of “medical professionalism” holds that medical practitioners, working together, are best suited to establish the standards and values that govern their practice and to monitor each other’s adherence to these standards.

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