

Breaches of Medical Professionalism

Examples of breaches of medical professionalism include but are not limited to the following:

1. abuse of power
2. poor interactions with patients and colleagues
3. discrimination, bias, harassment, and bullying
4. breach of confidentiality
5. arrogance
6. greed
7. misrepresentation
8. impairment
9. lack of conscientiousness
10. conflicts of interest.

1. Abuse of Power

The respect and trust of patients and professional colleagues are to be cherished, not abused. Abuse of power can take many forms such as not allowing patients to contribute to decision-making in their own care; allowing financial and academic competitiveness to affect judgment, including the honest evaluation of peers and trainees. Gratuitous denigration of others also represents an abuse of power.

2. Ineffective and Inappropriate Communication and Interactions with Patients and Colleagues

Poor interactions with patients and families may compromise medical professionalism. Insufficient empathy, insensitivity to patients' and family members' needs, feelings and wishes, deficient rapport with patients and families, and inadequate commitment to honoring the wishes of patients are symptoms of poor professionalism, not mitigated by skills and good outcomes.

Inappropriate relationships with other health care professionals may compromise medical professionalism. The inability to function within a team, lacking sensitivity to the needs, feelings and wishes of colleagues, and discrimination are major hindrances to creating a healthy and satisfying professional environment.

Medical professionals should behave professionally and be respectful in all venues, including electronic communications and social media.

3. Discrimination, Bias, Harassment and Bullying

Medical professionals are responsible for fostering an environment in which all colleagues enjoy respect for their contributions and can advance to their full potentials, irrespective of disability, ethnicity, gender, race or religion. This involves eliminating inequities that limit professional and personal development. Attitudes and behaviors that create hostile environments violate the basic principles of the medical profession.

Abusive behavior directed toward medical students or professional colleagues is unacceptable. Harassment and bullying, verbally abusive, demeaning, insulting, or threatening words, actions and/or behaviors damage professional relationships with others and compromise the integrity of the medical profession.

4. Breach of confidentiality

Patients trust that conversations and information obtained as part of the patient/physician relationship will be held in strictest confidence. This trust is not to be violated. Casual comments or discussion of patients in public are breaches of confidentiality and are unacceptable.

5. Arrogance

Arrogance is an offensive display of superiority and self-importance. The ultimate result is the pretension of the arrogant individual to superior importance or rights, thus interfering with the expression of empathy and respect and destroying professional relationships with others, including patients.

6. Greed

Greed can be defined as the inappropriate aspirations to fame, power or money. Greed impairs altruism, caring, generosity and integrity and therefore interferes with professionalism. In order to avoid greed, physicians must constantly re-evaluate their motives to ensure that no actions are dictated solely by personal gain.

7. Misrepresentation

Misrepresentation includes lying and fraud. Lying requires a conscious effort to misrepresent the truth. Lying about class assignments or experiments and misrepresenting patient related data are very serious breaches in professionalism. Fraud is a conscious misrepresentation of information with the intent to mislead. Lying, cheating, stealing or false representation of information are serious threats to professionalism.

8. Impairment

Medical students and physicians who are impaired in their ability to carry out their professional obligations must relinquish their responsibilities, particularly when caring for patients. Medical professionals have a duty to ensure that this standard is maintained among their colleagues. Rationalizations that inhibit prompt and appropriate action are potential failures of professional obligation.

9. Lack of Conscientiousness

Lack of conscientiousness is a failure to fulfill one's responsibilities. Some examples of lack of conscientiousness are a lack of effort toward self-improvement and adaptability, resistance or defensiveness in accepting criticism, remaining unaware of one's own inadequacies, resisting changes and not accepting responsibility for errors or failure.

10. Conflicts of Interest

Medical professionals must avoid situations in which the interest of the physician is placed above that of the patient, or where the scientific process is affected by other interests. Medical professionals must recognize, understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest in medicine and science.