CONSENSUS STATEMENT: MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM IN A CHANGING CONTEXT: BEYOND SPECIALTIES; BEYOND BORDERS

A profession is defined as:
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 of the use of its knowledge base, and 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.

Based on a definition of a profession proposed by Geoffrey Davies the medical profession also has a duty, individually and collectively, to put the interests of patients ahead of those of the individual practitioner, of the profession and of other bodies. Ancillary to that duty is a wider duty to existing and future patients generally. These are duties of public service.

Traditionally, characteristics of medical professionalism involve a duty to patients that embodies professional competence and performance and includes:
• Honesty and integrity
• Confidentiality
• Altruism
• Respect and compassion.

The context in which the practice of medicine occurs has changed significantly in the 21st century. Changes in recent times include increasing societal expectations of the profession; advances in information technology; changing models of care and increasing demands on health care systems in the context of finite resources.

Contemporary medical professionalism must also include:
• Demonstration of continuing professional development and lifelong learning
• Maintenance of patient confidentiality and professional boundaries
• Clinical leadership, including health advocacy
• Intra and inter-professional communication team skills
• Responsibility for one’s health and fitness to practise
• A collective duty to meet societal needs.

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact on professional performance. The use of professional development tools, including frameworks that describe professional behavior, assist doctors to enhance their performance.

The attributes of professionalism and their application to medical practice require continual review as evidence of the commitment of the profession to the health and well being of society.

In the 21st century the characteristics of medical professionalism continue to be applicable to all doctors and are grounded in a duty to individuals and society.

References