

CLUM – PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES

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a precise definition of professionalism, we know it when we see it.

The literature of the health professions offers a treasure trove of thought on the subject of the characteristics of professionals, the qualities we perceive as evidencing professionalism and the effects of not possessing an adequate amount of professionalism. Swick acknowledges "there is no common understanding of what is meant by the term professionalism" and then offers nine characteristics/perspectives that together will create a "normative definition" of professionalism.⁵ His recipe includes the following:

- Subordination of their own interests to the interests of others
- Adherence to high ethical and moral standards
- Response to societal needs with behavior that reflects a social contract with the communities served
- Evincing core humanistic values, including honesty and integrity, caring and compassion, altruism and empathy, respect for others and trustworthiness
- Exercising accountability for themselves and for their colleagues
- Demonstration of a commitment to excellence
- Demonstration of commitment to scholarship and to advancing their field
- Dealing with high levels of complexity and uncertainty
- Reflection on their actions and decisions

Arguing against any aspect of the criteria related above is, in American terms, to argue against "mom and apple pie". What is there in the nine statements above that each and every one of us would not like to see more of in our chiropractors, in our physicians, in our lawyers, in our accountants, or even in our auto mechanics? What is there in the nine statements above that we did not hear one way or another from our

parents, our elementary school teachers, our clergy, our civic groups form the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides to our Rotary and Kiwanis clubs? Plainly stated: nothing.

In 2004 the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) published an educational resource for "Advancing Education in Medical Professionalism" designed to enhance residency education through outcome assessment.⁹ The first question posed in the summary of the curriculum guide is "How does professionalism affect the patient-physician relationship? The answer offered:

- Professionalism is related to patient satisfaction. Patients are more likely to be satisfied with physicians who behave professionally.
- Patients are more likely to follow through with treatment recommendations when they trust their physician (trust is a component of professionalism)
- Patients say they are more likely to stay with physicians they perceive as behaving professionally and are more likely to recommend these physicians to others
- Most patient complaints about physicians involve physicians' unprofessional behavior
- Patients are more likely to bring legal action against physicians they perceive as behaving unprofessionally than other physicians
- Evidence suggests a relationship between physician excellence and professionalism

Let's look at these answers a bit more carefully. Who is primarily served by each of these perspective — the patient or the physician? The score: physicians 5, patients 1. With the exception of "Patients are more likely to follow through with treatment recommendations when they trust their physician" much of the remainder is about serving the needs of the physician. Maybe we need to give Mr. Shaw's contemp-

tuous position more consideration!

An examination of patient feedback on the subject is a bit more instructive. Patients value competence in their health care providers, but they do so with caveats. They appear to want expertise and good counsel but they want their way. Schattner in an article entitled, "Good physicians from the perspective of patients" indicated "patients studied want their physician to be highly professional and expert clinicians and show humaneness and support, **but their first priority is for the physician to respect their autonomy**"¹⁰ (emphasis added)

More recently Bendapudi et al. in the Mayo Clinic Proceedings authored "Patients Perspectives on Ideal Physician Behaviors."¹² According to the authors the "ideal physician" is confident, empathetic, humane, personal, forthright, respectful and thorough. Technical capacity was not cited by the respondents to any significant degree, a finding that the authors opine was due to the difficulty in the patient assessing this aspect of care.

With the thoughts of Swick accepted as a universal foundation for any and all professions what are the elements of professional life and responsibility as a chiropractor that we value and desire? Stated alternatively, what are the qualities in the individual that will best support them in their career as a chiropractor and in the larger context of the community of chiropractors?

When I think of ideal qualities in a chiropractor I think of the experiences I had as a young man under chiropractic care. At that time I was impressed with the concept of chiropractic and the person who conveyed that concept to me. At this point in my life I am not sure which aspect had the greatest impact on my life. For me that chiropractor was the epitome of professionalism. He personified the qualities that the Mayo patients said they were looking for in their health care providers and he modeled the qualities Swick expressed. But his professionalism included so much more. When I think of him the following qualities come to mind:

1. **Humanity.** Compassion, empathy and a desire to serve characterized

my introduction to chiropractic. My life was changed through that introduction. While the care provided improved my health, the manner of the person delivering the care changed my life. He possessed all of Swick's measures of professionalism and each and every one of them paled in significance in light of how much he gave of himself in the process of his encounter with me. He was a very busy practitioner but in his presence nothing existed in the world beyond me. As a result time stood still, seconds lasted for minutes and minutes lasted for hours. His humanity added so much to the care I received and yet it took no extra time and it added no additional cost. In my life it changed a health care encounter into a life altering opportunity.

2. **Courage.** The chiropractor that gave me my first adjustment was a courageous man. He had the courage to offer me and my family a totally different way of looking at my problem. The physicians involved completed a thorough diagnostic assessment and had offered me few options and little hope that my situation would change for the positive. My chiropractor did not promise me a miracle cure but what he did do was to offer the possibility that something else might be considered. Fortunately for me his approach included the courage to think and reason beyond the evidence of the day. Had he not, my life would be radically different today. If you have concluded through this commentary I am rejecting the importance of evidence-based approaches you are incorrect. However, I am speaking of using the best evidence available even if that is limited to your clinical experience and reasoning.

3. **Respect.** My chiropractor taught me many lessons of respect. I gained a respect for him as a man and as a chiropractor. In time I realized the respect he gave me for the reality of minority status. He expressed an understanding that like it or not, fair or not deals with minority perspectives in a consistent fashion. The member of a minority class represents the class, the member of the majority class represents himself/herself. An appreciation of this dynamic is an important quality for the chiropractor to possess. He taught me that he and I, as you and I, represent the entirety of chiropractic worldwide. When we fall short, the response is "those damned chiropractors" but when a member of the majority class fails "every group has a bad apple." The failure to appreciate this fact of life of the chiropractor leaves the individual confused about the reactions of many to them and as such it is disorienting.

4. **Awe.** Together with my first few adjustments I received an introduction into the awesome capacity of the human to heal. Prior to this point in my life healing was the product of one drug or another. Now for the first time in my life I was introduced to the concept that healing was the norm rather than the exception. I was further introduced to the idea of supporting this capacity to express itself as opposed to confounding it. Collectively these concepts

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