

Professionalism in Medicine

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As we progress through medical school, we acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to diagnose and treat patients. As well, we need to develop an understanding of the social context of medicine and develop the personal and professional skills and attributes necessary to effectively practice it. There are many subtly different ways to define medical professionalism. In 2002, the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and *The Lancet* published 'Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physician charter'. This charter argued that 'professionalism is the basis of medicine's contract with society'.¹ Within the idea of professionalism, the charter identified three fundamental principles:

- The principle of primacy of patient welfare
- The principle of patient autonomy
- The principle of social justice

In this way, professionalism can be seen as a way of doing things to best treat the patient in front of us, as well as serve the wider community. A commitment to professional development requires us to utilise the skills and values we learn throughout our undergraduate training, and to continue this growth beyond medical school.

These values expected of us in our profession include honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, benevolence and confidentiality, amongst others. Professionalism can also encompass how we present ourselves, for instance, how we dress and how we talk. This can be both within a clinical setting and in society at large. You may remember a lecture on this topic at some point during medical school; however professionalism is an abstract concept that is often best understood when seen in practise.

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) published a consensus statement on the role of the doctor at the end of last year (2011). It acknowledges doctors as leaders within a healthcare team, as well as leaders and advocates working towards improving public health. It is very evident that we do not practice medicine in isolation, and that the wider socioeconomic factors play an important role in determining which patients present to us at the hospital. It makes sense for doctors to advocate on behalf of our patients in both an acute setting and regarding the upstream factors that affect their health. The Editorial Team for the New Zealand Medical Student Journal (NZMSJ) feel the consensus statement published by the NZMA is an important document for all medical professionals working in New Zealand, and as such we have re-printed the statement in this issue of the Journal.

As well as the values and skills that we develop throughout our training, there are other things we can do to develop professionally. For instance, keeping up-to-date with the latest advances in research is a necessary aspect of our work. Conducting research, and contributing to the growing body of medical knowledge, is something we should all strive to do. There

are many opportunities for undertaking research during medical school. These include: the Bachelor of Medical Science with Honours, summer studentships, and clinical audits. When the NZMSJ was established by a small group of students in Dunedin in 2003, the rationale behind it was to create a medium to publish summer studentship research. The Journal provided, and continues to provide, an opportunity for students to learn more about the process of getting their writing published.

Another way to further develop professionally is by attending conferences. This can be daunting as a student, but can nonetheless be a hugely valuable experience. Conferences offer the opportunity to present research, and to interact with experts in the area. Some conferences, such as the NZMA General Practice and Medical Exhibition Conference, actively encourage student attendance and are a great opportunity to interact with more knowledgeable professionals, and to meet other students with similar interests.

In this issue of the NZMSJ, we present work done by your colleagues. We have an original research article by Calvin Lim looking at serum PSA in BPH; Cameron Schauer has written a case report on profound hypothyroidism; and Karyn Anderson shares her experience of the RANZCOG Annual Scientific Meeting. We also publish articles from overseas that we believe would be of interest to medical students in New Zealand.

The NZMSJ is the labour of love for a dedicated team of medical students based throughout the country. We hope you find this issue of the New Zealand Medical Student Journal educational and thought-provoking. As always, we are keen to hear from you. We welcome your letters to the editor, articles and book reviews. We wish you all the best for the second half of the academic year.

REFERENCE

1. **Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physician charter.** *Ann Intern Med.* 2002 Feb; 136(3):243-246.