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A profession can be defined as a vocation or 'calling', especially one involving a degree of skill, learning or science. Another helpful description is that of "a trade or occupation pursued for higher motives, to a proper standard".

Medical professionalism is a belief system in which group members ("professionals") declare ("profess") to each other and the public the shared competency standards and ethical values they promise to uphold in their work and what the public and individual patients can and should expect from medicalprofessionals
Professionalism is one of the most important factors contributing to a successful healthcare career.
Healthcare involves many personal interactions with a variety of people. Professional manner in healthcare is more than just good manners; it is about establishing respectable relationships with patients, colleagues, and supervisors.

More than a century ago, George Bernard Shaw famously observed that all professions were 'a conspiracy against the laity'. Since that time, much has been written about the nature of professional practice and the contribution of professionals to society. In the health and social care arena today, patients, service users and their families want the professionals they interact with to offer specialist skills but also to treat them with respect, communicate clearly and behave in a way that reflects high standards of personal probity.

Bernard Shaw's cynicism may well be anachronistic given the patient-centred and shared decision-making approach favoured in medicine today. Modern medical professionalism includes the ability to communicate specialist knowledge, diagnosis and treatment options in an easy-to-understand way, rather than seeking to use specialist knowledge as a means to create distance from, and a dependency of, the public. Professionalism also involves confidentiality, continuity, trust, honesty and compassion.

Medical professionalism embraces a wide variety of behaviors, which can be articulated as specific competencies. Frequently articulated competencies include a commitment to carrying out professional responsibilities and an adherence to ethical principles; demonstration of compassion, integrity, and respect for others; responsiveness to patient needs that supersedes self- interest; respect for patient privacy and autonomy; accountability to patients, society and the profession;
and sensitivity and responsiveness to a diverse patient population.

For medical professionalism to function effectively as a means of organizing and delivering health care, it must be recognized as an active and iterative process involving: (1) defining; (2) debating; (3) declaring; (4) distributing; and (5) enforcing the set of discrete, shared standards and values that medical professionals agree must govern its work. During this process, proposed definitions of competencies (whether technical, interpersonal, or values-based) are vetted through a process of internal debate. They then are declared to the public to open dialogue and to assure that they meet social needs while upholding core professional values. Subsequently, these standards must be distributed to all relevant stakeholders to ensure they are understood as the heart of medicine's social contract with society, and they must be enforced as such by the profession. This entire process is underscored by a commitment to ongoing engagement with each other and with other stakeholders to develop and maintain consensus and to conjointly promote and enforce the agreed-upon competencies on behalf of patients and the public.

Patient expectations of healthcare experience vary widely, but for the most part people are seeking care that is patient-centered and meets their needs. The use of technology in the exam room has added another element to patient interaction.

In medical practice, healthcare professionals are using mobile phones and tablet computers to look up drug and treatment reference material, help choose treatment plans for patients, and help make diagnoses.

While these devices can be helpful for doctors and patients, they can become distractions that could potentially damage patient interaction. Although mobile technology and computers have become the norm in many medical facilities, healthcare professionals must keep their focus on the patient.