

Tools to Increase Individual Professionalism

Professionalism is the basis of medicine's contract with society. It entails placing the interest of patients above those of the health care worker, while setting and maintaining clear standards of behavior that emphasize compassion, competence, and integrity. In order for professionalism to exist in our health care environments, we must see some very specific outcomes. These outcomes will insure that professional behavior is the norm in our health care environment.

Clear Behavioral Expectations

First and foremost is the need for expected behaviors to be understood by all. If professional behavior is to exist, there must be clear behavior expectations that are communicated throughout our policies, practices, communications, training programs, and the like. Ways to best communicate vary from organization to organization, but some suggested strategies that might be considered are: 1) the adoption of a **Physician Charter** (see inclusion); 2) the design of **mentoring programs** where clearly defining professional behavior is an expectation and it is then emphasized in the modeling of professional behavior; 3) the design of **Performance Management Systems** (see inclusion) that speak to the importance of professionalism by including it as part of the evaluation; 4) the use of **Executive Coaches** that can assist health care workers in improving their level of compassion, caring, integrity, or impulse control; 5) the design of specific and **targeted training programs** that will assist the organization in improving areas of weakness or areas that need special emphasis, and; 6) the introduction of the importance of professionalism in **New Employee Orientation** so that the expectation is there from the very start of one's career with an organization. These are just a few suggested strategies to insure that professionalism is expected as a behavioral norm.

Professionalism Measurements

In order to increase professionalism, we must be able to assess the current state. This can be done in many different ways and with many different tools. Strategies that can be used to measure professionalism include: 1) utilizing **360 degree feedback** so that we can gather feedback from one's boss, one's peers, one's subordinates, and also one's customers; 2) utilizing **employee survey data** to gather employee perceptions about how they are treated and how others are treated, and; 3) utilizing **patient satisfaction data** to assess the level of professionalism that the patient observes.

Professionalism Reinforcements

Finally, the third outcome is the reinforcement and recognition of professional behavior. Some examples of reward and recognition programs that may be appropriate include: 1) some sort of **annual recognition of physicians** who are the epitome of professionalism. UTMB does this with the Osler Scholar Award (see inclusion); 2) a **first year residents award** might be appropriate as we train new physicians or health care workers, and; 3) an **organizational recognition program** that emphasizes professional behavior for all staff. An example of this would be the GEM (Going the Extra Mile) Program at UTMB where all employees, students and volunteers recognize each other continually. This is then reinforced for all by sharing the names in announcements, on web sites, and at town hall meetings. A drawing is then held each quarter and awards are given to further reinforce the concept.