Statement on Medical Professionalism

We affirm our commitment to creating and maintaining a community that supports and encourages respect for every individual. To that aim, we expect all members of the UVM College of Medicine community to act professionally in the school, hospital and wider community with patients, those close to them, families and colleagues.

Tenets of Professionalism

Ten relevant and important Tenets of Professionalism have been identified which pertain to medical professionals at all stages of education, training and practice within the UVM College of Medicine community. These include:

1. **Altruism**

Altruism is defined as the unselfish regard for the wellbeing of others and is essential to engendering trust. Total selflessness is not sustainable and must not be confused with altruism. Self-care fosters balance in the lives of physicians, which ultimately leads to improved patient care.

2. **Compassion and Empathy**

Compassion refers to the awareness of, acknowledgement of, and desire to relieve, the suffering of others. Empathy refers to the ability to put oneself in another’s situation. Compassion and empathy dictate that a person’s individual lifestyle, beliefs, idiosyncrasies, and support systems be respected and taken into consideration.

3. **Accountability and Responsibility**

Medical professionals are accountable and responsible to their patients for fulfilling the implied contract governing the patient/physician relationship, to their profession for adhering to medicine’s time-honored ethical principles, and to society for addressing the health needs of the public. Medical professionals are accountable and responsible to their colleagues for maintaining the highest level of professionalism.

4. **Excellence and Scholarship**

Excellence in medicine entails conscientious efforts to exceed ordinary expectations during medical education and training, and beyond. Scholarship entails curiosity and motivation for life-long learning and improvement.
5. Duty and Service

Duty is an obligation to serve others, even when the beliefs and values of the person being served differ from one’s own. For the medical professional, duty implies an awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness to patients and others in need. Service is the sharing of one’s talents, time, and resources with those in need.

6. Social Responsibility

Medical professionals must promote justice in the health care system, including fair distribution of health care resources. They should work actively to eliminate discrimination in health care, as well as barriers to health, and to advocate for the availability of health care for all. Medical professionals must demonstrate concern for and responsiveness to social problems that endanger the health of members of society. Recognizing its relevance to human health, medical professionals must support and promote environmental sustainability.

7. Honor and Integrity

Honor and integrity are the consistent regard for the highest ethical standards of behavior. Honor and integrity include truthfulness, fairness, conscientiousness, commitment to the ethical principles of medicine and faithfulness to commitments and obligations.

8. Respect

Respect is the sincere regard for the autonomy and values of other people -- their feelings, needs, thoughts, ideas, wishes and preferences. This includes patients, those close to them, families and colleagues.

9. Humility

No matter how well informed, well trained and knowledgeable a medical professional may be, humility requires medical professionals to develop an awareness of the limitations of our current knowledge, our systems which make use of current knowledge, and our own personal abilities.

10. Cultural Competence

Cultural competence refers to the ability to interact effectively with people of varying social or cultural backgrounds, different beliefs or practices, different race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability and veteran status. This requires awareness and recognition of one’s own cultural attitudes and traditions and a sincere curiosity to understand the cultural attitudes and traditions of others. Developing cultural competence results in an increased ability to understand, respect, communicate with, and interact effectively with other people.

Updated April 12, 2012