

PROFESSIONALISM PRINCIPLES

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Professional values critical to the survival of healthy physician/patient relationships are under assault within the field of orthopaedic surgery. Our unique and privileged position within society at large is dependent upon our ability to continue to foster the highest professional values that our field has traditionally held. Because of the concern expressed by AOA leadership in observing the erosion of these professional values, in June, 2005 a task force was constituted to develop a guidance document for use in selecting individuals for leadership positions within the American Orthopaedic Association. The AOA would like to encourage all national, regional and subspecialty orthopaedic surgery associations and societies to strongly consider these issues when selecting individuals for positions of leadership. The following document serves as the AOA official guidance on defining professionalism.

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AOA Professionalism Guiding Leadership

Professionalism and those traits demonstrating professionalism are important characteristics in the effective leadership of medical organizations. Certain behaviors associated with the term "professionalism" are considered necessary and mandatory characteristics in the field of medicine. Additional aspirational behaviors are essential to those in leadership positions. Demonstrated "virtues" of a true professional include benevolence, honesty, fidelity, courage, compassion and truthfulness. AOA leaders should seek candidates for AOA leadership positions who exemplify the following virtues (1-3) and demonstrate the following traits (4-8):

1. Honesty

- ◆ Physicians must assure that patients are fully informed both prior to treatment and after treatment has occurred.
- ◆ Leaders must deal with colleagues and those who report to them in an honest, forthright and transparent fashion. This virtue also requires that mistakes and other difficult topics are dealt with in an honest, open fashion.

2. Altruism

- ◆ This characteristic is demonstrated by overt behavior that shows a commitment to act in the best interests of the organization and put personal or other popular interests aside.
- ◆ Demonstration of a personal integrity may be in the form of putting professional responsibilities ahead of the pursuit of private gain or advantage, either politically or financially. In an era rife with hidden and potential conflicts of interest, an honest review, assessment and disclosure of potential and real conflicts of interest demonstrates true altruism.

3. **“Heroic” behavior**

- ◆ Demonstration of heroic behavior means standing up for what’s right and the betterment of society/medicine. This characteristic in tandem with altruism assures that the physician should always put the best interest and welfare of the patient ahead of personal or financial gain. At times this may require self-sacrifice of the physician. The patient must be able to trust and to expect that, in the face of a difficult decision, the physician will put aside his/her own self interest. This virtue is also demonstrated by service to the indigent without any expectation of compensation.
- ◆ Leaders exhibiting this set of principles in their daily interactions also demonstrate such heroic behavior by consistently supporting the “greater good.”

4. **Demonstrated commitment to competency** – both in orthopaedic surgical care and in communication and leadership

- ◆ Physicians must strive to maintain and increase not only their own expertise, but to be responsible for assuring that medical professionals on their team are competent. Physicians also have a duty to uphold science-based standards, promote research and ensure the proper use of new knowledge and technology. A commitment to professional responsibility in the form of collaboration to maximize quality patient care, participation in self-regulation and discipline of the profession, and effort in the development of continuing education and standard-setting are hallmarks of this characteristic. An essential part of this commitment is the ability to understand and respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse patient population.
- ◆ Commitment to competence in leadership means the conduct of deliberate self-evaluation and the continuous pursuit of leadership and communication skills development and improvement.

5. **Maintenance of competence**

- ◆ Maintenance of competence is defined as a physician’s continuous pursuit of self-improvement and life-long learning. Physicians possess a specialized knowledge not easily understood by the general public. This expertise is essential to a well-functioning society and physicians must make a commitment to continually increase this knowledge.
- ◆ Competence in leadership means that leaders must seek leadership education and skills development to advance their ability to lead.

6. **Demonstrated commitment to improving patient care**

- ◆ Physicians must be committed to the perpetual improvement of patient care, through participation in quality of care initiatives, collaboration/teamwork to reduce medical errors and increase patient safety, and utilization of mechanisms to optimize patient outcomes. A parallel responsibility in this category is the pursuit of true access to care – physicians must personally and collectively work to reduce barriers to care and promote an available, uniform and adequate standard of care.
- ◆ Leaders must use organizational and other external resources to ultimately serve the best interests of the public.

7. **Demonstrated leadership**

- ◆ To justify societal trust a physician’s “social contract” with society includes three components:
 1. a fiduciary duty to both patients and colleagues,

2. an economic duty to act responsibly to those individuals or entities that pay for medical services,
 3. the broader duty to act in the best interest of societal health and in the utilization of resources.
- ◆ Physicians must apply these same principles to their leadership roles held in civil, social and professional organizations.
8. **Proven ethical practice** of medicine with public accountability.
- ◆ The ability of medical professionals to self-regulate and discipline those members who practice in an unethical way is key to this characteristic and also key to the public's ability to trust in physicians.
 - ◆ A leader should have the ability to maintain and apply high ethical standards in all facets of leadership, whether social, civic or professional.