

BEST PRACTICES

Teaching Ethics and Professionalism

Specific instruction in ethics and professionalism is now widely recognized as an essential component of medical training. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), which is responsible for the accreditation of all post-MD medical training programs in the U.S., has identified 6 competencies that are required of all residents. One of these competencies is "a commitment to carrying out professional responsibilities, adherence to ethical principles, and sensitivity to a diverse patient population."¹

What can residency training programs do to assure that residents are adequately trained in ethics and professionalism? Paul L. Schneider, MD, who chairs the Ethics Advisory Committee of the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System, recommends the educational materials developed under the American Board of Internal Medicine's Project Professionalism. These materials, which are available on-line, address a broad range of ethics topics including breach of confidentiality, misrepresentation, sexual harassment, and physician impairment. The materials provide 20 vignettes for use in teaching, as well as recommendations for evaluating professionalism and strategies for remediation of unprofessional behavior in residents.² According to Dr. Schneider, "the residents really seem to enjoy the vignettes-they are realistic but challenging."

Two other on-line educational resources on ethics and professionalism are also noteworthy. The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, which requires residency programs to teach ethics and professionalism as a condition of accreditation, has developed a product called Bioethics Curricula consisting of teaching modules designed for the disciplines of medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, and psychiatry.

Another very useful on-line educational resource on ethics and professionalism is Ethics in Medicine, which was developed as part of the Bioethics Education Project within the University of Washington School of Medicine. This curriculum addresses a wide range of topics using a helpful question-and-answer format. The topics covered include the following:

- Advance Care Planning
- Advance Directives
- Breaking Bad News
- Complementary Medicine
- Confidentiality
- Cross-Cultural Issues and Diverse Beliefs
- Difficult Patients

Do Not Resuscitate Orders
End-of-Life Issues
Ethics Committees and Consultation
Futility
Genetics
HIV and AIDS
Informed Consent
Interdisciplinary Team Issues
Law and Ethics
Managed Care
Mistakes
Personal Beliefs
Physician-Assisted Suicide
Physician-Patient Relationship
Professionalism
Public Health Ethics
Quality of Life
Research Ethics
Resource Allocation
Spirituality and Medicine
Student Issues
Termination of Life-Sustaining Treatment
Treatment Refusal
Truth-telling and Withholding Information

The entire Ethics in Medicine curriculum is available on-line at:
<http://eduserv.hscer.washington.edu/bioethics/>.

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1. <http://www.acgme.org/outcome/comp/compMin.asp>
 2. <http://www.abim.org/pubs/profess.pdf>