

# The Virtuous Professional

A System of Professional Development for Students, Residents and Faculty



# The Virtuous Professional

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# The Virtuous Professional

## A System of Professional Development for Students, Residents and Faculty

### OVERVIEW

At Michigan State University College of Human Medicine (MSU/CHM), we recognize the importance of educating professionals who will bring strong scientific knowledge to bear on problems in a humane and compassionate manner.

In addition to creating and delivering a strong academic curriculum, we also recognize the need to establish an educational environment that encourages all of us to strive for excellence, to continuously deepen our character, and to aspire to be virtuous professionals.

What we do as professionals is important. But so is who we are. We may act in accordance with our professional responsibilities merely because it is expected or because we fear the disapproval of others if we don't. Although acting in accordance with our duties is better than not doing so, we express our character only when our actions are supported and motivated by our devotion to some ideal of the type of person we hope to be.

There are many kinds of ideals to which we could aspire, which at MSU/CHM we call "virtues."

### Three CHM Virtues

#### Three Virtues

1. Courage
2. Humility
3. Mercy

### Six Professional Responsibilities

#### Six Professional Responsibilities

1. Competence
2. Honesty
3. Compassion
4. Respect for Others
5. Professional Responsibility
6. Social Responsibility

### Process of Professional Growth

#### Process of Professional Growth

1. Dialogue
2. Reflection
3. Practice



# The Three CHM Virtues

## Courage, Humility and Mercy

**THREE CHM VIRTUES** At MSU/CHM, we focus on the virtues of Courage, Humility, and Mercy as representative of our core values. Like all virtues, their exercise requires the use of judgment:

- 1. Courage** refers not only to bravery in the face of a physical threat (although sometimes that's what courage may require) but also to the readiness and ability to take risks in order to do what is ethically best.
- 2. Humility** refers to a deep appreciation of the limits of our knowledge, skills, or abilities to make the right decision. It also demonstrates the capability to learn from our mistakes and receive critical feedback.
- 3. Mercy** refers to our disposition to meet the needs of others out of empathy, especially in the context of the power imbalance inherent in the patient-physician or student-teacher relationship.

As ideals, the virtues of courage, humility, and mercy are never perfectly attainable. Each occasion that calls for them presents a challenge to which we may or may not rise.

The three crucial virtues are at the heart of excellence among our students, residents, and faculty. They support the highest exercise of our professional responsibilities. These professional responsibilities draw the line between ethically acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It is critically important to avoid unethical behavior toward patients, colleagues and others, but that is a minimal expectation. In the larger context of our pursuit of excellence, it is also essential to aspire to ideals that reach beyond doing the right thing, toward becoming the kind of person and the kind of professional we would most like to be.

**Pursuit of Virtues** Pursuit of virtues and ideals is often necessary for really living up to our responsibilities.

**Courage** The virtuous professional may need to have *courage to be honest*. Being honest sometimes carries risks (e.g., fear of retaliation by those who have power over us or avoidance of emotionally difficult conversations with patients or colleagues). When honesty is called for, the virtuous professional will need the courage to take those risks. If we misjudge what is best and are courageous in the wrong cause, we are only foolhardy. If we take risks that aren't necessary to achieving the good we're aiming at, we are merely reckless.

**Humility** The virtuous professional may also need the *humility* to acknowledge how little s/he may know about the influences that shape her behavior. Recognizing how his/her own self-interest might lead her to inadvertently act in less-than-honest ways allows him/her to take deliberate steps to avoid potentially compromising relationships, or minimize their influence. Humility also causes us to realize that we are human, and need to tend to our own wellness before we can adequately care for others. If we have too little humility, we become arrogant. If we have too much humility, we become meek, submissive and unable to exercise our powers on behalf of the good of others.

**Mercy** The virtuous professional also needs the virtue of *mercy*. The truth can often hurt, and it takes sensitivity, genuine concern, and skill to convey it in ways that protect the feelings of others, especially those with less power than our own. Compassion for others, un-tempered by any love of or compassion for oneself, leads to self-effacement. Sympathy which misunderstands what others' needs are, or the actions needed to meet them, won't support a truly compassionate response. It will amount to nothing more than pity.

All the virtues and responsibilities intersect with and mutually support each other. Courage can be linked to professional responsibility, humility to competence and respect for others, and mercy to respect for others as well as social responsibility. Our aspirations make the performance of our responsibilities personally and morally meaningful. They also draw us beyond our duties and set horizons for our growth as persons.



# The Process of Professional Growth

## Dialogue, Reflection and Practice

### PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Cultivating the three virtues of Courage, Humility and Mercy is a lifelong project that requires **Dialogue, Reflection, and Practice**. At MSU/CHM, we strive to create an environment that views each of these three processes as avenues to our personal and professional growth. Some of the activities described here may be a formal part of training programs; others may be informal programs that enrich our perspectives and growth.

#### 1. Dialogue

We are not entirely transparent to ourselves. Both our strengths and our failings are often more easily seen by others. We need to take advantage of the perspectives of others not only to discover where growth is needed, but to see how it can be achieved. In addition, when we can offer help to others, we often find that we've also grown in our understanding, of them, and ourselves. In learning how others have accomplished great things in the face of great difficulty, we can see new possibilities for ourselves. In finding the words to explain our own frustrations and difficulties, we often clarify our own understanding of our motives and behavior.

Dialogue can take many forms:

- Talking with others about our own behavior and difficulties, and talking with others about the difficulties we see them facing.
- Sharing and listening to stories of failure, or stories of triumph in living up to ideals.
- Using novels, films, and other media to learn about those who lived up to their ideals in the face of adversity, despite their vulnerabilities.
- Exploring our institutional and social environment with others, discovering how to change that environment to make it less corrosive of and more consistent with our ideals.

#### 2. Reflection

Dialogue is important, but becoming a better person and a better professional requires self-**reflection**. Self-reflection, like a reflection in a mirror, makes it possible to see ourselves as others see us. This psychic "distance" allows us to review our actions and motives with some objectivity, so that we can own our shortcomings while taking pride in our strengths. It is only within this balanced view of the self—neither self-dismissive nor arrogant—that emotional and moral growth is possible. In order to effectively practice self-reflection, we need to be well, both physically and mentally.

Reflection can be practiced in many different ways:

- Finding and taking time to be alone for careful self-reflection, away from everyday pressures and distractions
- Writing reflectively about events, thoughts, and feelings—for example, writing about our day in response to questions like, "Who am I? Was I the person I really want to be in the many events of my life today? How did I live out of my strengths today? What did the day show me about how I want to or need to grow?"
- Reflecting 'out loud' with trusted friends or mentors about our role in particular experiences—what were the thoughts, feelings, or beliefs I had at the time that influenced how I conducted myself in a particular situation?
- Learning to be reflective 'on-the-spot.' For example, being intentionally aware of others' immediate body language and/or facial reactions to something we just said or did.

#### 3. Practice

Dialogue and reflection are essential but will go nowhere without **practice**. We don't mean the practice of good works, although there's nothing wrong with that. We mean the practice of stepping up to the plate, where most of us strike out much of the time. Becoming stronger in virtue is like becoming a better musician. If we never push ourselves out of our comfort zone, we never discover and develop our real potential, in playing the piano, or growing in courage, humility and mercy.



# The Process of Professional Growth

## Dialogue, Reflection and Practice

### Process of Professional Growth (Continued)

These virtues should of course be practiced in the everyday world of interactions with patients, families, students, and colleagues. But risking failure in the real world, where the stakes may be high, is daunting. So we usually stay in our comfort zone, because that's where we are confident in our ability to perform. The result is that our capacities for excellence never grow, because they are never stretched.

Here are some possibilities for challenging our growth and development:

- To gain practice in our ideals, we must first recognize that we are in a situation requiring courage, humility, or mercy. Dialogue and reflection can help develop the perceptiveness we need to know when we must rise to the occasion.
- Engaging in Dialogue like that described earlier will present plenty of occasions requiring some degree of courage, humility, or mercy; to practice in this way also requires a safe and supportive environment in which to take risks.
- Life presents many other opportunities to work at the frontiers of our abilities, and grow in our skill—in sports or hobbies, for example. Learning how to step out of our comfort zones in these settings will carry over into confidence in doing so in the pursuit of our ideals. We need to practice life balance, enriching ourselves in areas beyond medicine, including our relationships with family and friends, physical wellness, and mental rest.

*Practice, Dialogue, and Reflection* should be seen together as different parts of an ongoing cycle: through a process of actively reflecting on and discussing our recent practice (seen as specific actions in specific contexts), we learn about who we are and how we need to or want to grow—as adults and as professionals. We can then take that new learning out into our lives and try something new in practice, the experience of which can then be reflected on and discussed to provide new insights into how we can grow in excellence, in our humanity and in our professional practice.



# Six Professional Responsibilities

Competence, Honesty, Compassion, Respect for Others,  
Professional Responsibility, Social Responsibility

## SIX PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

MSU/CHM has long articulated a set of desirable professional responsibilities for its faculty and students that serve as examples of professional behavior. These six are:

1. **Competence**
2. **Honesty**
3. **Compassion**
4. **Respect for Others**
5. **Professional Responsibility**
6. **Social Responsibility**

Each responsibility is really a journey toward an ideal goal; no student, residents, or faculty has actually reached the goal, and every professional is capable of at least some improvement with regard to each attribute.

MSU/CHM has created a system in which students, residents, and faculty can be clear about responsibilities, can better monitor their own behavior and progress, and can meet the professional behavior expectations in their role. The specific expectations for each of these responsibilities will depend on the individual's level of training and the demands of their role. We also expect our students, residents, and faculty to be able to self-correct and to assist their peers in their own professional development.

Definitions of a virtuous professional embrace the concept of a self-renewing, self-regulating individual recognized by society as working toward a common set of professionally-defined and societal-sanctioned goals, possessing a unique set of knowledge and skills, and operating within a defined code of behavior. At MSU/CHM the students, residents, and faculty are committed to the following responsibilities of professional behavior:

*Recognizing that not all faculty see patients, the indicators listed below should be applied as appropriate to each individual in the context of their role or level of training in the CHM community.*



# Professional Responsibility

## 1. Competence

<b>1. Competence</b>	<p>There is a responsibility to be <i>competent</i>. Others rely on us, whether they are students, residents, colleagues or patients. We must develop and maintain the skills and knowledge necessary for performing the tasks required by our roles.</p>
<b>Goals</b>	<p>Virtuous professionals master the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to their discipline. They accept this mastery as a lifelong responsibility. They are motivated to learn not merely out of scientific curiosity, but also from concern for the people who depend upon them. They recognize limits to their competence because professionals, no matter how expert, have gaps in their knowledge and skills.</p>
<b>Indicators</b>	<p>Virtuous professional <u>students</u> striving for competence will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• take responsibility for learning individually and in a group setting</li><li>• strive consistently for mastery</li><li>• exhibit a conscientious effort to pursue excellence in patient care, when applicable</li><li>• reflect accurately on the adequacy of personal knowledge and skill development</li><li>• identify and begin to address personal limitations and other barriers to learning and growth</li><li>• reflect with colleagues on the success of group work</li><li>• avoid assuming responsibility beyond their level of competence</li></ul> <p>Virtuous professional <u>residents</u> striving for competence will pursue all of the above and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• exhibit a conscientious effort to pursue excellence in patient care</li><li>• exhibit a conscientious effort to pursue excellence in scholarly work</li><li>• manage patients using evidence-based principles</li><li>• acknowledge intellectual and technical limitations to self, students, and teachers</li><li>• avoid assigning responsibilities to learners that are beyond their level of competence</li><li>• exhibit a commitment to pursuing causes of medical errors and strive to avoid them in the future</li></ul> <p>Virtuous professional <u>faculty</u> striving for competence will pursue all of the above as applicable and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• acknowledge intellectual and technical limitations to self, residents, students, and colleagues</li><li>• have a commitment to lifelong learning</li><li>• meet Continuing Medical Education annual goals</li><li>• maintain board certification credentials</li><li>• see safety as a priority in patient care and role model this for students and residents</li></ul>



# Professional Responsibility

## 2. Honesty

<b>2. Honesty</b>	<p>There is a responsibility to be <i>honest</i>. Lying to or misleading others can adversely affect the welfare and rights of others, undermine the ability of colleagues to meet their responsibilities, compromise personal integrity, or have other serious consequences.</p>
<b>Goals</b>	<p>Virtuous professionals are honest in working with students, residents, faculty, colleagues and patients. All disciplines are fundamentally dependent upon accurate knowledge, so that any acceptance of untruth, no matter how inconsequential it may seem at first, threatens to undermine the very foundations.</p>
<b>Indicators</b>	<p>Virtuous professional <u>students</u> striving for honesty will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• avoid cheating, plagiarism, and misrepresentation of the truth</li><li>• answer questions in relationships with patients openly and accurately</li><li>• openly admit when he/she does not know the answer to a question</li><li>• record on a patient's chart only data that have been observed and verified</li><li>• report observed instances of dishonesty to appropriate authorities, regardless of their relationship to the subject of the report</li><li>• assure that all research data, for which they are responsible, are recorded fully and accurately</li><li>• take credit in publication only for work actually performed</li></ul> <p>Virtuous professional <u>residents</u> striving for honesty will pursue for all of the above and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• respond to patient and student questions with accuracy and openness</li><li>• report dishonest behavior of colleagues using appropriate lines of communication</li></ul> <p>Virtuous professional <u>faculty</u> striving for honesty will pursue all of the above and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• avoid fraudulent activities and conflicts of interest</li><li>• disclose errors to patients and offer a sincere apology</li><li>• assure that publications only include data that have been obtained by appropriate research methodology</li><li>• disclose teaching errors to trainees and offer a sincere apology</li><li>• conduct research ethically and without conflict of interest</li><li>• accurately represent research findings in scholarly work</li></ul>



# Professional Responsibility

## 3. Compassion

<b>3. Compassion</b>	There is a responsibility to be <i>compassionate</i> . Here we refer to those basic expectations that everyone must meet. Wanton disregard for the feelings or welfare of others is an affront to common decency. Such behavior is especially objectionable among health professionals, who have pledged themselves to serve those who come to them in need.
<b>Goals</b>	Virtuous professionals (whether <u>students</u> , <u>residents</u> , or <u>faculty</u> ) are compassionate and use empathy to sense others experiences and concerns. They appreciate the experiences of others, including their suffering and fear, and learn to respond to that fear and suffering in a humane and healing manner.
<b>Indicators</b>	Regardless of their role or level of training, virtuous professionals striving to be compassionate will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• identify, articulate, and respond to the fear, suffering, and hopes of others</li><li>• seek to assist colleagues in dealing with the challenges of professional work</li><li>• seek feedback on the effect of his or her behavior on others</li><li>• understand the context of illness within a biopsychosocial model</li><li>• use empathy to sense others' experiences and concerns</li><li>• understand the vulnerability of learners and patients</li><li>• articulate possible concerns of learners and patients and respond to them with empathy</li><li>• give "bad news" in an honest, understanding, and empathic manner</li><li>• attend to the needs of the dying patient</li></ul>



# Professional Responsibility

## 4. Respect for Others

### 4. Respect for Others

There is a responsibility to *respect others*. All persons have basic rights that must be respected; and patients have special additional rights that must be protected. All persons should be treated with common courtesy.

#### Goals

Virtuous professionals maintain attitudes and behaviors that communicate respect. The value and dignity of others is respected in all encounters. Because respect requires appreciation of the feelings, beliefs, and experiences of others, the virtuous professional learns about different social and cultural groups so persons from such groups may be treated with a deeper understanding.

#### Indicators

Virtuous professional students striving to respect others will:

- demonstrate humility in interactions with others
- treat fellow students fairly and consistently
- value the dignity of every human being
- understand the meaning of cultural and lifestyle differences among people and strive to embrace those differences
- value the role of every person in the health care system
- value the role of the family in the care of the patient
- respect the personal and sexual boundaries of others
- avoid sexism, racism, and sexual orientation bias in interactions
- continuously question assumptions about others
- articulate and embrace differences among people and demonstrate an awareness of how such differences affect personal interactions
- demonstrate a commitment to resolve conflict in a collegial manner
- show sensitivity to the needs, feelings, and wishes of health team members
- respect patients' autonomy, privacy and right to control access to personal information about their lives and health by disclosing information only to those who are directly involved in the care of the patient.

Virtuous professional residents and faculty striving to respect others will pursue all of the above and:

- embrace the principles of patient autonomy and shared decision-making
- openly present thorough management options to patients
- embrace principles of confidentiality and informed consent
- understand how much can be learned from medical trainees
- recognize the power differential between self and, especially, patients, students, and allied health care personnel
- resolve conflicts in medical encounters with patients, students, and colleagues in a respectful manner



# Professional Responsibility

## 5. Professional Responsibility

### 5. Professional Responsibility

There are special *professional responsibilities*. Those entering a profession like medicine take on certain commitments that are inherent in the role. These include such basics as refraining from taking advantage of others through the power of one's authority; making the welfare of others, rather than one's self-advancement, a primary goal; protecting the integrity of the profession; and others.

#### Goals

Virtuous professionals realize that as a professional they have a responsibility to assure that professional goals are met in all settings. They understand that certain types of personal conduct seriously threaten the professional goals of medicine. They recognize that these unacceptable behaviors and other abuses of the power that society has granted the profession need to be strictly avoided.

#### Indicators

Virtuous professional students striving for professional responsibility will:

- contribute to a positive learning and health care delivery environment
- be present and punctual for activities that are integral parts of the learning experience and patient care
- take responsibility to notify others, in advance whenever possible, when unavoidable absence or tardiness occurs
- be able to put patient needs ahead of one's own needs
- cope with the challenges, conflicts, and ambiguities inherent in professional health care
- avoid activities that involve substance abuse or sexually offensive behavior
- demonstrate a willingness and ability to identify, discuss, and/or confront both his or her own problematic behaviors and those involving colleagues
- be available and responsive when "on call"
- be available to help other students, residents and colleagues
- set aside time and energy to care for one's own wellness and relationships with friends and family

Virtuous professional residents striving for professional responsibility will strive for all of the above and:

- confirm patient history and physical examination findings of students
- give students prompt and respectful feedback about performance and when appropriate, ways to improve
- follow-up on promises to patients and students
- return patient calls in a timely fashion
- be accountable to and meet reasonable expectations of patients and students
- avoid activities that involve abuses of power
- recognize boundary issues of intimacy with patients and students
- recognize the drug industry's influence on the medical profession
- evenly share the workload with colleagues

Virtuous professional faculty accepting professional responsibility will pursue all of the above and:

- follow-up on promises to patients and learners
- confirm patient history and physical examination findings of learners
- give learners prompt and respectful feedback about performance and when appropriate, ways to improve
- be accountable to and meet reasonable expectations of patients and learners
- recognize boundary issues of intimacy with patients and learners
- recognize financial or scholarly credential greed as a potential motivator and seek ways to reduce it
- mentor junior faculty, residents and students
- be prepared and on time for teaching responsibilities and committee assignments
- actively participate in committee meetings



# Professional Responsibility

## 6. Social Responsibility

<b>6. Social Responsibility</b>	There are <i>social responsibilities</i> . Health professionals recognize that there are social, political, economic, and other factors in the larger environment that adversely affect the health of the people they serve. This entails some commitment to changing those factors through political, educational or other avenues according to the individual's circumstances and skills.
<b>Goals</b>	Virtuous professionals realize that all people live in societies that profoundly influence an individual's health. Virtuous professionals honor the obligation to conduct themselves in a trustworthy manner and to act upon the responsibility inherent in the trust traditionally bestowed upon physicians and other professional groups.
<b>Indicators</b>	Regardless of their level of training, virtuous professionals (whether a student, resident, or faculty) striving for social responsibility will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• be able to identify the multiple social factors that threaten the health of patients</li><li>• be proactive, outside the singularity of the patient-physician relationship, in addressing the social factors that adversely affect the health of patients</li><li>• freely accept a commitment to service</li><li>• advocate for the best possible care regardless of ability to pay</li><li>• seek active roles in professional organizations</li><li>• volunteer one's skills and expertise for the welfare of the community</li><li>• create and maintain a positive learning and health care delivery environment</li><li>• address the health needs of the public</li></ul>



# History and References

**Authorship:** The original “Virtuous Student Physician” document and its logo were produced by Ruth Hoppe, but it represents a synthesis of inputs from several CHM faculty. Terry Stein chaired the College of Human Medicine Task Force on Medical Student Professional Behaviors. Its members included: Robert Bridgham, Howard Brody, David Engstrom, Shelagh Ferguson-Miller, Jake Foglio, Wanda Lipscomb, Harold Sauer, Sharleen Sakai, and Sally Sprafka. Howard Brody chaired the Task Force Subgroup that developed the CHM virtues. Later inputs have come from Christine Shafer, Jane Smith, and Clayton Thomason (1999).

Since its authorship, a variety of curricular and extra-curricular activities have been developed aimed at engaging students and faculty in an ongoing process of dialogue and reflection. Individuals key to these planning efforts have included Jake Foglio, Clayton Thomason, Christine Shafer, Dianne Singleton, Wanda Lipscomb, Ruth Hoppe, many student members of the Group on Professional Development, and many faculty preceptors in the Mentor Program (2001).

**Authorship:** The new “Virtuous Professional” document represents a synthesis of inputs from several small work groups from the Task Force on Faculty Professionalism. William Wadland chaired the College of Human Medicine Task Force on Faculty Professionalism. Its members included: Laura Carravallah, Robin DeMuth, Jake Foglio, Renuka Gera, James Harkema, Rebecca Henry, David Kozishek, Wanda Lipscomb, Janet Osuch, Joel Maurer, Brian Mavis, John Molidor, Donna Mulder, Mary Noel, Steven Roskos, Rae Schnuth, Chris Shafer, Aron Sousa, Margaret Thompson, Tom Tomlinson, Jane Turner, Dianne Wagner, Daniel Webster. The logo was designed by Donna Mulder. (2009-2012)

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