

**Professionalism: from abstract to application**  
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**Introduction:**

When Pat MacKinley asked me to speak to you on professionalism, my first thoughts were that “Professionalism is an abstract concept difficult for me to define” and likely difficult for you to grasp and understand at this stage in your studies. We recognize professionals with ease but have difficulty describing their qualities and characteristics.”Some examples that come to mind are:

- The doctor who takes the time to explain a prognosis to his patient, answer questions, and respects both patient and family input before making decisions on treatment.
- The tailor who not only takes your measurements, but also takes great pride in how you look in the finished product.
- Les Canadiens as they went down in smoke the other night!..... particularly Carey Price as he shook hands with players who had just scored on him. That’s professionalism!
- The many professors and clinicians who have inspired and mentored you throughout this present journey.

This is a day to remember and take pride in having earned the qualifications to begin your clinical placements and join the community of rehabilitation specialists. The Question is: Do the name tags and titles that you receive today make YOU a professional? Does the knowledge base that you’ve worked long and hard to acquire over the past few years instantly bestow upon you the “aura” of a professional?

You might say: “I’m prepared to ‘walk the walk’ by looking the part”. Gone are the “Welcome to Walmart t-shirts”, low rise pants, no rise pants, belly rings, halter tops, nose and tongue rings in favour of a lab coat and stethoscope. I must say that you all look the part today!

No doubt..... YOU will have a PROFESSION when you complete your studies. However.... It’s easy to focus on all the visual trappings of professional life as opposed to the true essence of professionalism.

## **What is Medical professionalism?**

We are privileged to be sitting in the halls of one of the world's renown professionals. Sir William Osler who studied and taught medicine at McGill back in 1872 was a pioneer of medical professionalism. Some of his famous quotes include:

**“The practice of medicine is an art not a trade, a calling not a business.....  
a calling in which your HEART and HEAD will be exercised equally ”**

**“To be professional evokes an image of high competence and high ethics. “**

The TRUE characteristics of a professional are:

- Dedication to patient care
- Dedication to excellence
- High competence
- High ethics
- Compassion
- Respect and sensitivity to culture, age, gender, and disabilities.
- Honor
- Dedication to the profession
- Communication
- Honesty

So how do we apply these principles to practice?

### **1.Compassion and Dedication to Patient Care**

You 'll soon be standing at the threshold of the room which houses YOUR FIRST PATIENT. I'll never forget that day!

When evaluating new patients who have recently had their independence, functional mobility, and quality of life put in jeopardy by paralysis, loss of limb, or diagnosis with degenerative or palliative disease...DON'T FOCUS on the recording of your evaluation or the outcomes measures that you wish to use. FOCUS on the patient and his family or caretakers who are seeking your EXPERTISE and respond to THEIR needs with compassion.

Once again to quote Dr Osler

**“Never forget the look on the patient’s face, the tremble of his hands, the falter in his speech, and the dreams he has”**

You’re committing yourself to a contract which will impact their lives. Assure them that you will work with them for the best functional outcome and quality of life possible. THEN..... you can proceed to record your findings on examination within the context of their needs.

## **2. Dedication to patient care**

No doubt, some of you will decide to work in a Hospital or other acute care Institute when you graduate and be confronted with the cyclic dilemma of deciding whether or not to continue offering weekend service coverage. This service provides staff for acutely ill and largely bedridden patients in ICU, palliative care, and medicine. The Director of Professional Services has decided that patients will NOT be mobilized unless professional staff are available and you ‘ve been asked to vote in favour or against maintaining this function.

You’re FIRST thoughts are...YES! Weekends free!!

Some food for thought..... Patients don’t disappear on weekends!! If the services we provide during the week are considered essential then weekend coverage should also be considered essential. The unconditional caring of patients before self is one of the hallmarks of a professional.

## **3. Ethics and Integrity**

For those of you who intend to work in private Clinics listen carefully. Over the past 5 years I’ve been involved in the evaluation of medico legal files on behalf of our Professional Order. The review of these extensive files was unfortunately related to questionable rehabilitation services provided by some of our members.

Treatment proliferation to generate profits or increased income from 3<sup>rd</sup> party payers including Workmen’s Compensation, the SAAQ, or insurance companies has become a disease in our profession. Physiotherapists and occupational therapists are being coerced into overseeing files when technicians or aides work

without supervision. This practice allows treatment frequencies to proliferate without checks and balances. The repetition of treatment recipes without modification over time or consideration of the underlying pathology is highly unprofessional. Workman's compensation patients may not be your preferred clientele but your priority should be to focus your energies and professional expertise on getting them back to work as soon as possible.

Professionalism becomes concrete if we believe in the value of our expertise and respect patient care above all. Profit incentives should never take precedence over good treatment. Being a business owner doesn't make you a professional, but a guaranteed excellence and quality of care regardless of patient source does.

#### **4. Communication skills**

When sitting in multidisciplinary rounds do you.....

**“look wise, say nothing, and grunt!” .....to echo the words of Dr Osler once again.....or share your findings with other medical and paramedical colleagues?**

As students and soon to be new graduates you may well be reluctant to speak up. But that is one of the hallmarks of a professional. Your expertise will not likely save lives but will likely contribute significantly to improving quality of life. You have a responsibility to represent the patient as well as our profession under these circumstances. A MUTE presence reinforces the notion that we are not an essential service. Bring your heads, your hearts and your courage to Rounds and “speak up!”

#### **5. Duty and Commitment**

You have been asked by the School to help organize a National Conference. Your first thoughts are that “this is going to be a lot of work!!” “I have more important things to do!” and the classic “ Let someone who's less busy take on this responsibility!”

It's not easy to make the time to be involved in professional activities. But the interaction with colleagues on a Provincial, National, and International level is indispensable to your growth and pride as a professional. The proudest moments

of my professional career have been those in which I chaired a Conference, a National committee, or had the opportunity to represent my profession in a multidisciplinary forum. The love of your work, the expertise that you develop over the years and the commitment to your profession shines as a beacon. In very concrete terms “ Ask what you can do for your profession as opposed to what it can do for you .”

### **In Summary .....**

Striving for excellence is the over-riding characteristic of all professionals and includes full commitment to patient care and full commitment to the advancement of your profession. Be lifelong learners, seekers of knowledge and maintain the curiosity of discovery.

**” Use your 5 senses. Learn to see, learn to feel, learn to smell and know that by practice alone you become an expert.”**

Wear your badge with pride .

And as Bugs Bunny would say.....“to the open road”!!