

Position

Pharmacy is a profession. Despite the challenges to professionalism presented by changes in health care, pharmacists must embrace the responsibilities that stem from their profession's guiding principles. Among those responsibilities are advancing the well-being and dignity of their patients, acting with integrity and conscience, collaborating respectfully with health care colleagues, and seeking justice in the distribution of health care resources.

The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) encourages pharmacy practitioners, administrators, faculty members, preceptors, and students to advance patient care and strengthen the pharmacy profession by promoting professionalism in everyday practice. ASHP urges pharmacists to dedicate themselves to serving the interests of their patients and to practicing with compassion and respect for patients and their families. Pharmacists should commit to working cooperatively with and with respect for other health care providers and to seeking to improve the quality of health care received by the communities in which they work and live. ASHP encourages pharmacists to serve as mentors to students, residents, and colleagues in a manner that fosters the adoption of high professional aspirations for pharmacy practice, high personal standards of integrity and competence, a commitment to serving humanity, habits of analytical thinking and ethical reasoning, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Background

Between 1995 and 2005, the number of PubMed-indexed articles on professionalism quadrupled, from 50 to approximately 200 per year.¹ Professional associations from the American College of Physicians–American Society of Internal Medicine to the American College of Dentistry have convened task forces, developed white papers and charters, and initiated programs to increase the professionalism of their members.^{2–6}

The rising interest in professionalism has been attributed to the perception that changes in health care delivery are eroding the professional standards of health care providers.² Among the changes confronting the pharmacy profession are managed care's continuing emphasis on cost containment⁷; increased demand for systems that ensure the safety of medication use⁸; technology-driven changes in pharmacy's core re-

One of the fundamental services of a professional is recruiting, nurturing, and securing new practitioners to that profession's ideals and mission.¹⁵ For hospital and health-system pharmacists, professional socialization is especially important because the principles of institutional pharmacy practice are not emphasized in typical pharmacy curricula. Above all else, hospital and health-system pharmacists need to prevent "inconsistent socialization,"¹⁶ in which the principles of professionalism instilled in pharmacy students are undermined by a lack of professionalism in the role models they encounter when they enter practice. Pharmacy departments can avoid inconsistent socialization by promoting a culture of professionalism in the workplace through personnel recruitment and evaluation systems that emphasize professional development.¹⁶ Regardless of the level of support they receive, however, hospital and health-system pharmacists must commit themselves fully to their mentorship responsibilities.

ASHP urges practicing pharmacists to serve as mentors to students, residents, and colleagues in a manner that fosters the adoption of high professional aspirations for pharmacy practice, high personal standards of integrity and competence, a commitment to serve humanity, habits of analytical thinking and ethical reasoning, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Practice sites should designate preceptors, implement preceptor training programs, encourage preceptor adherence to the highest professional standards, solicit student feedback on preceptorship programs, and reward those who participate.⁶ Hospitals and health systems should also explore other ways to promote mentorship relationships among staff. Hospital and health-system pharmacists and students can participate in ASHP's Virtual Mentoring Exchange.¹⁷ ASHP encourages pharmacists, particularly new practitioners, to actively seek mentors.

Finally, hospital and health-system pharmacists can advance the cause of professionalism in health care by reinvigorating the mission development processes of their institutions, encouraging those institutions to revise their mission statements to describe how they will address such ethical issues as the treatment of patients, employees, and staff; institutions' responsibilities to their communities, to other institutions, and to their own futures; the need to honor founding traditions and sustaining principles; and the complex interactions of legal and ethical responsibilities and their obligations to meet legislatively and socially defined needs.¹⁸

In 1976, Anderson¹⁵ called on hospital pharmacists to "create a code that reflects our relationships with all of the different people and conditions under which we practice." The time has come for hospital and health-system pharmacists to join forces with other health care providers and patients to engage what has been called "the new authorities of health care"¹⁸ to attain the kind of health care system our patients deserve and our society demands.

18. Reiser SJ, Banner RS. The Charter on Medical Professionalism and the limits of medical power. *Ann Intern Med.* 2003; 138:844–6.

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