

THE NUCLEAR MEDICINE TECHNOLOGIST—A NEW MILLENNIUM HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL

As I started preparation for this new academic year, I developed a small lecture for our freshman class centered around “Professionalism.” What is professionalism? What does it mean? What does it have to do with a group of freshman radiologic science majors?

Most of us know professionalism when we see it, but it’s a quality that is hard to pin down. Is it a style of dressing? A way of walking? A way of speaking? Is it based on IQ or education or professional credentials? Here’s one definition I discovered in a paper on medical professionalism:

“Professionals share characteristics such as self-governance, accountability, life-long learning, fiduciary responsibilities, and most of all, a Code to abide by” (1).

That’s a good start, but it doesn’t get at the essence. I began to piece together a list of the qualities that enable us to call an occupation a profession, and its members, professionals:

A discrete body of knowledge and skills.

Admission [to the profession] requires education and training; the profession determines the qualifications, the number of students, the curriculum, and requirements for licensure.

Within the constraints of the law, the professionals control admission to practice and the terms, conditions, and goals of the practice itself (2).

I now had a definition and a set of guidelines that I could give to the students accompanied by our profession’s Curriculum Guide, Certification Exam Applications, Registry Rules, Licensure Laws, Scope of Practice, Practice Guidelines, Code of Ethics, and Continuing Education Rules. These were the guidelines that their education should prepare them to adopt and live by on a daily basis. But I added one last definition:

Professionalism is the basis of medicine’s contract with society (1).

This definition holds the key to being a health care professional: you must be



patient-centered. For a profession to survive and remain strong, it needs to grow and redefine itself as its knowledge base and society changes. Keeping this in mind, I have chosen goals for my tenure as Technologist Section president that will help ensure that when these freshmen students graduate, they will join a profession that they can be proud of.

Goal 1: To expand the PET Learning Center and increase its availability to technologists working in the field. Over the next few months the PET Learning Center will be developing a CT component to cover the new PET-CT machines. We will also be packaging the program for delivery at the chapter level. Education and life-long learning are critical to the survival of any profession; therefore, the society is striving to make this educational service as widely available as possible.

Goal 2: To finalize the details for the implementation of the new Professional Development and Education Fund. For a profession to survive, it needs to invest in itself and its members. The goals of this new development fund are to support NMT education for those already working in the field, to increase research performed by nuclear medicine technologists, and to ensure the promotion of NMT activities.

Goal 3: To work with SNM leadership to select a consulting firm to help us implement the new government relations plan. One of the goals of the plan

is to ensure the successful passage of the CARE Act (see Public Affairs Update in this issue if you are not familiar with this proposed legislation). A profession has a responsibility to ensure that those practicing it are qualified to do so; over 800 professions are licensed by state governments across the country including hairdressers and car detailers, but nuclear medicine technologists are licensed in less than half the states!

Goal 4: To continue to pursue educational opportunities and proper licensure for nuclear medicine technologists who are using PET-CT scanners. In this issue you will see the beginning of that process in the consensus statement from the stakeholders meeting we convened with the ASRT in July. (See Fusion Imaging: A New Type of Technologist For a New Type of Technology in this issue.)

Goal 5: To seek new ways of getting technologists involved in research and publications. In October a group of nuclear medicine technologists gathered in Virginia to develop an action plan to fulfill this goal. Successful research programs and publications are key to the development of any profession. A professional journal and other publications allow for the benchmarking of ideas and the sharing of information. They also promote and assist in the life-long learning process. Research and a forum to share it are critical for our profession’s future growth, establishment of standards, and pursuit of excellence.

So what is your definition of professionalism? I hope I have provoked some new thoughts on this subject, and that you will share with me some of your ideas as we move towards our strategic planning session at the mid-winter meeting. All ideas will be welcome. You can contact me by email at fkeech@mcp.edu.

REFERENCES

1. Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physician charter project of the ABIM Foundation, ACPASIM Foundation, and European Federation of Internal Medicine. *Ann Intern Med.* 2002;136:243–246. <http://www.annals.org/issues/v136n3/full/200202050-00012.html>
2. Cruess SR, et al. Professionalism must be taught. *BMJ.* 1997;315:1674–1677.