

### Above All, Professionalism - Overview



In the United States, physicians are among the most respected of all professionals. The practice of medicine must be more than a job or occupation, and the physician must always be guided by the highest professional ethical and personal standards. Professionalism calls for dedication to the patient; every aspect of his or her welfare (physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, financial, etc.) must be taken into account and served to the best of the physician's ability. Physicians are expected to commit themselves to the process of lifelong professional development. Professionalism in medicine requires the recognition that medicine involves both science and art and is fundamentally devoted to the service of humanity.

## Above All, Professionalism - Scenario Script

### Scene 1

*A frustrated-looking patient is sitting on an examination table. A doctor enters the room.*

Doctor: Mr. Wallace, I'm so sorry we're running late...

Patient: Doc, I been waitin' here forever. What, did you guys take a big lunch party or somethin'? Geeze...

Doctor: No, Mr. Wallace, one of the patients had a medical emergency and we all had to work to get him stabilized and get him over to the ER. So it took some time that none of us had planned for... We never did get lunch. But anyway, I'm here now so let's get started.

Patient: Well, doc, it's a quarter of six. You know we both shouldn't be here so why don't you do me a favor? Write me a prescription with a lot of refills so we both can go home.

Doctor: I appreciate your hurry but that wouldn't be the best way to proceed. You've been here on your medications for quite a while and it's been a long time since I've seen you last and that's why I wanted you to come here. It would be bad medicine to just write refills and, even if it is late, you deserve the best care.

Patient: [somewhat apologetically] Well, doc, Ok. But can we make it quick?

Doctor: Quick as we can, but I have to tell you I came across some new studies in the New England Journal articles, and we might want to reconsider the medications that we've got you on. The medications we've got you on... [scene fades out as doctor continues to talk.]

### Scene 2

*A patient is sitting on an examination table. There is a knock on the door and a man wearing a white coat over scruffy jeans, dirty running shoes, and a T-shirt enters the room. He has a stethoscope around his neck.*

Doctor: Hey. How ya doin'?

Patient: Ok... [looking the man up and down] How soon I can see the doctor?

Doctor: I *am* the doctor....

Patient: Well you sure don't look like the doctor!

**Above All, Professionalism - Discussion Questions**

1. Why is the patient in the first scenario upset?
2. How does the doctor address the patient's concern?
3. Was the delay in seeing this patient justified? Could it have been avoided?
4. How does the patient propose to expedite the visit?
5. How does the doctor deal with that request?
6. What information does the doctor introduce that might prolong the visit?
7. Which aspects of professionalism does this doctor demonstrate in dealing with this patient? Did he demonstrate any unprofessional behavior?
8. In the second scenario, how is the doctor's credibility undermined?
9. Did he demonstrate any professional behavior?

### **Above All, Professionalism - Scenario Analysis**

This module includes two scenarios. In the first, the patient is annoyed because his doctor is running late. Unfortunately this is not an uncommon occurrence in a busy clinical practice. The first thing that the doctor does upon entering the room is acknowledge the delay and apologize for it. When the patient suggests that the delay may have been due to an excessively leisurely lunch on the doctor's part, the doctor does not become defensive. Instead he explains exactly what happened and why the delay was unavoidable.

The patient then suggests that the physician expedite the visit by writing him a prescription with a lot of refills. The doctor declines, pointing out the importance of performing an appropriate assessment of the patient and his medical problems. He remarks that the proposed shortcut would represent inferior care. The patient concedes but encourages the doctor to hurry. The doctor agrees to do his best, but also makes it clear that more time may be necessary to make an adjustment to the patient's treatment based on some recent studies he has been following. He explains that though this assessment will take a bit more time it would represent the best standard of care.

This doctor shows a high degree of professionalism by insisting on providing the best possible care even though it requires him to stay late and the patient is anxious to be finished. The physician's whole manner in dealing with the patient conveys a determination to provide the best care and helps the patient understand the importance of taking the necessary time for a proper assessment. His reference to the current journal articles also indicates that he is paying proper attention to the patient's case beyond his clinic visits and demonstrates his professional commitment to lifelong learning.

The second scenario obviously demonstrates a strong lack of professionalism. The physician's attire and his manner of addressing the patient are nothing short of abominable, and that clearly undermines the patient's confidence in her doctor. As she succinctly states, he certainly doesn't look like a doctor!