

Title: Medical professionalism adapted to faith and cultural beliefs in Saudi Arabia

Authors: El-Metwally D^{1,2}, Azzam M^{1,2}, Badghaish F¹, Majeed M¹, Abou Al-Seoud M¹

The problem addressed: Over the past 25 years, professionalism has emerged as a hot topic in medical education and practice. This topic had been scarcely tackled in the Middle East which has its unique ethical codes and faith-based practices. The Students' Professional Practice and Accountability (SPPA) Program aims at 1- developing a foundation of basic professional skills among students (under and post graduates) and 2- adapting faith and cultural practices to enhance commitment to the health and well-being of individuals and society through ethical practice and high personal standards of behavior.

The impact of faith, cultural practices, and beliefs on Medical Professionalism was addressed as regards gender sensitivity, communication among veiled female doctors, patient service/education during prayer time and Ramadan (Fasting month), faculty-trainees social relationships, and drug company funds for scientific activities and international conference attendance.

What was tried: The SPPA project was conducted at the King Fahd Armed Forces Hospital (KFAFH), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Participants included 1- Fifth year medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia who rotate monthly in the Pediatric department at KFAFH. 2- Residents of the Pediatric, and Obstetrics and Gynecology departments at KFAFH. The SPPA sessions were half-a-day, narrative and interactive ones. The SPPA sessions included 8-10 trainees. The critical incident technique was applied utilizing simulated cases/vignette adapted from standards provided by CANMEDS from The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, American Boards of Internal Medicine, and Barry Challenges to Professionalism questionnaire. Also, generated scenarios and incidents that were unique to the local cultural practices were used.

Some attributes of Medical Professionalism (altruism, excellence, duty) and threats (abuse of power, lack of conscientiousness, conflict of interest and impairment) were conflict evoking. Discussion of issues unique to the regional culture yielded alignment with the community and acceptable professional practices as regards gender sensitivity and veiled female practitioners. Faith practices; as 5 times-a-day prayers were adapted in a manner where patients' needs emerged as a priority even if prayers were missed during the designated duration. Personal relations and marriages were not adapted to the standard professional codes and only followed faith-based regulations. Drug Company's support was mostly an acceptable practice, and was one of the topics where the SPPA foundation program had the strongest impact on altering the

common beliefs. Knowledge acquisition was assessed using a pre and post test. Preliminary results showed a mean pre-test score of 32.5% and post-test score of 87.9%.

Lessons learned: The SPPA program had significantly increased awareness and knowledge among trainees regarding Medical Professionalism. It unveiled general adaptation to the unique faith and cultural practices that align with standard professionalism. However, there are some areas as personal relationships that need regulatory precautions, to be adapted to the faith-based norms without violating the professional practices. The SPPA program experience could be duplicated in other countries in the region.

¹Pediatric Department. King Fahd Armed Forces Hospital, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

²Pediatric Department. Faculty of Medicine, Suez Canal University, Egypt.