What is (Transdisciplinary) Professionalism and How Might it Work?

A Facilitated Table Discussion

Matthew Wynia, MD, MPH
Institute for Ethics, American Medical Association
Disclosure and Disclaimer

Matthew Wynia, MD, MPH, FACP

Developed the Climate Assessment Tools program for the AMA, a non-profit endeavor to produce tools to measure aspects of the professional climate in health care organizations.

Views and opinions expressed are mine alone and should not be construed as statements of the American Medical Association.

Also, please remind me if I start speaking as though I’m talking only to doctors, or only to a US audience …
“O.K., you be the doctor, and I'll be the Secretary of Health and Human Services.”
Outline for our discussion

1. The inherent tensions of professionalism
   (or, What is professional autonomy?)

2. Professionalism and its alternatives
   (or, What are our choices?)

3. How (transdisciplinary) professionalism might work
   (or, Who would need to do what?)
In health care, “professional autonomy” means …

1. The right of an individual practitioner to practice as they wish, without oversight by someone else

2. The right of professional groups to establish and enforce standards of practice

3. Both 1 and 2

4. None of the above, it means something else.
If there were no sense of “professionalism” among people working in health care …

1. High quality care could be achieved using *mainly* competitive market mechanisms

2. High quality care could be achieved using *mainly* state regulatory mechanisms

3. High quality care could be achieved using a combination of competitive *and* regulatory mechanisms

4. None of the above, health care quality *depends* on professionalism

5. Something else
The *most important* factor in legitimizing a new, transdisciplinary professionalism would be …

1. Developing a shared, public process for setting transdisciplinary practice standards
2. Creating a shared certification system for all health professionals
3. Getting buy-in from the major existing professional associations
4. Having a powerful health professional society that is open to all
5. Developing specific transdisciplinary training competencies with valid assessment tools
6. Something else
Part I

What is Professional Autonomy?
Have a seat Kermit. What I'm about to tell you might come as big shock...
A profession is
A group of men
pursuing a learned art
as a common calling
in the spirit of public service,
no less a public service because it may incidentally
be a means of livelihood.
A profession is an occupation for which the necessary preliminary training is intellectual in character, involving knowledge and to some extent learning, as distinguished from mere skill; which is pursued largely for others, and not merely for one’s own self; and in which financial success is not the accepted measure of success.
...professionalism consists of those behaviors by which we - as physicians - demonstrate that we are worthy of the trust bestowed on us by our patients and the public, because we are working for the patient’s and the public’s good.
Definitions of Professionalism
Medical Professionalism Project

ABIM Foundation, ACP-ASIM Foundation, and European Federation of Internal Medicine

• 3 Principles:
  ✔ Patient welfare
  ✔ Patient autonomy
  ✔ Social justice

• 10 Commitments
  ✔ Competence
  ✔ Honesty
  ✔ Confidentiality
  ✔ Appropriate relations
  ✔ QI
  ✔ Access
  ✔ Fair distribution of resources
  ✔ Science
  ✔ Manage COI
  ✔ “Professional responsibilities”
What the ‘List Approach’ Misses

• These are important lists of attributes we hope to see in clinicians – they comprise some of the shared promises of health professionals – but they are not professionalism, *per se*.

• Professionalism is not the set of things clinicians do, it is the *reason* why we do them.
Professionalism defined

- Profess: To speak out in public, openly declare
- Profession: A group speaking out, together, about their shared standards and values
- Professional: An individual member of the group; an act or behavior that is in conformance with the declared standards and values of the group
- Professionalism: a belief system (an “-ism”), holding that professional groups are uniquely well-suited to organize and deliver certain social goods
  - Establish shared standards and values to govern our work
  - Ensure adherence to them…
Inherent Tensions
Professional Standards/Personal Virtues

• Early on, AMA Committees set increasingly stringent quality standards for medical education, medical sciences, practical medicine, surgery, obstetrics, medical literature, etc.

• But also…

  …”there is no tribunal, other than [the physician’s] own conscience, to adjudge penalties for carelessness or neglect”

  AMA Code, 1847
“… the Code is more what you’d call ‘guidelines’ than actual rules.”

Captain Barbossa

Pirates of the Carribean
Table discussion question #1

To what extent should individuals joining the health profession give up their personal liberties to adhere to shared promises and oversight?

Prepare a brief example to share
In health care, “professional autonomy” means …

1. The right of an individual practitioner to practice as they wish, without oversight by someone else

2. The right of professional groups to establish and enforce standards of practice

3. Both 1 and 2

4. None of the above, it means something else.
Part II
Professionalism and Its Alternatives
Recent Theories of Professions

- **Structuralist-functionalist school (pre-1960)**
  - ☀ Useful social function for each professional characteristic
  - ☀ Profession as “interstitial go-between”
  - ☀ Psychologically distinguished people become professionals

- **Critical “power” theorists (1960-present)**
  - ☀ Professional prerogatives are hard-won privileges
  - ☀ Won through a collective pursuit of high status and income, including ... 
  - ☀ Willingness to make promises without intending to keep them
3 “Ideal Types” for Delivery of Important Social Goods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quality assurance</th>
<th>Ethics emphasize</th>
<th>Resource allocation</th>
<th>Health care is a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Optimize “value”</td>
<td>Normal good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(WTP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>Optimize social</td>
<td>Common good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>benefit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Collegial review</td>
<td>Fiduciary obligations</td>
<td>Balance individual and social needs</td>
<td>Values-based service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mixed Models: Quality Assurance

- **Professional**
  - Peer-review
  - Education, ethics and socialization

- **Economic/Market**
  - Consumer info ⇒ voice/exit
  - Use of certification/accreditation

- **Political/State**
  - licensure
  - malpractice
A Balancing Act

State  Profession  Market

© 2013 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
“Arguing that a desirable health care system must be based on trust in professional workers who are free to exercise discretionary judgment, I shall conclude that policy should aim at strengthening professionalism and employ elements of the other models – especially those of the free market – with great caution.”

Eliot Friedson

Professionalism Reborn

1994, University of Chicago Press
Table discussion question #2

How should state regulation and market competition affect professional practice standards?

Prepare a brief example to share
If there were no sense of “professionalism” among people working in health care …

1. High quality care could be achieved using *mainly* competitive market mechanisms

2. High quality care could be achieved using *mainly* state regulatory mechanisms

3. High quality care could be achieved using a combination of competitive *and* regulatory mechanisms

4. None of the above, health care quality *depends* on professionalism

5. Something else
Part III

How does professionalism claim to work?

And how might a transdisciplinary professionalism come about?
Why professionalism in health care?

“Natural” arguments

• Professionalism is required by the nature of medical work and the healing relationship
  – Vulnerability: Patients can be poor “consumers”
  – Complex/evolving practice: Difficult/impossible to write good regulations

“Social” arguments

• Professionalism is a choice made by society
  – Basic social contracts of professions well-established, with public and individual reliance
Some challenges…

• Enforcing professional standards entails curtailing the personal liberties of individual practitioners
• Healing uses individual art and population science - which to apply when?
• What are appropriate roles for the public and patients/clients/customers in writing the social contract?
Professionalism and legitimacy

• For professionalism to work, there must be active, iterative and public processes for:
  – Defining
  – Debating
  – Declaring
  – Distributing, and
  – Enforcing

• Sets of discrete, shared standards and values that members of the professional group agree should govern professional work.

Adapted from the ABMS definition of Medical Professionalism
Table discussion question #3

Is an explicit shared social contract for all health professionals worth pursuing?

Prepare one key early step – or one barrier – to discuss
The **most important** factor in legitimizing a new, transdisciplinary professionalism would be …

1. Developing a shared, public process for setting transdisciplinary practice standards

2. Creating a shared certification system for all health professionals

3. Getting buy-in from the major existing professional associations

4. Having a powerful health professional society that is open to all

5. Developing specific transdisciplinary training competencies with valid assessment tools

6. Something else
Thank You

matthew.wynia@ama-assn.org