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What Does It Mean to Be a Professional?

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What Does It Mean to Be a Professional?

All professions have unique skills, knowledge, and ethical standards that guide them in what knowledge and responsibilities are required and how to execute what has been learned. Three features characterize a profession and professional values:

1. Specialized training
2. Recognition of the need for standards of practice
3. Commitment to provide a service that goes beyond the personal interests of the professional

These values are critical to the ethical identity of the professional. The ever-volatile health care environment requires health care professionals to be guided by values and principles. The level to which we identify as professionals includes academic level, years of service, participation in professional organizations, serving in management positions, type of work, and type of work environment.

Professionalism is also an attitude—one that occurs through socialization and formal education. Attitudes and behaviors are often modeled after those of a professional role model. Professional self-image is still somewhat blurred, however. Contributors to this include low-quality working environments and organizations unwilling to invest in the professional growth of staff. But becoming a professional is ultimately the individual's responsibility. Professionalism leads to greater job satisfaction and improved patient care and outcomes. The individual must commit to life-long learning, taking opportunities to improve knowledge and skills, not just to get a favorable employee evaluation. And, a major contributor to the growth of professionalism is belonging to a professional organization.

Address correspondence to Rebecca Perez, BSN, RN, CCM, Fraser Imagineers, 6301 Ranch Dr, Little Rock, AR 72223 (rperez@fraserimagineers.com).

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Professional organizations generate energy, new ideas, and shared practices to support the growth of professionals. Take, for example, the evolution of nursing practice: Certain individuals in a group or society took on the role of caring for others who could not care for themselves. As these individuals became “experts” or “healers,” they shared their knowledge and experience with other experts and with those who would apprentice as their replacements. Nursing evolved from a vocation to a profession based on Florence Nightingale's view about how nurses should be educated and trained in patient care.

There are hundreds of health and health care-related professional organizations where professionals gather to share, talk, learn, and teach. Health care professionals advocate for those they serve, causes, and their respective roles. Advocacy for patients is rooted in moral and ethical principles. Professional organizations advocate for their respective profession and support members through education, policy, and best practice.

CMSA is your professional organization, and we are here to support you in your practice, advocate for you through health policy, and make available education programs that will advance your practice and elevate your level of professionalism. We are here to provide you with a united voice demonstrating to the health care industry and to those we serve that case managers are professionals advancing patient care and safety.

Rebecca Perez,
BSN, RN, CCM
CMSA Director of Product Development and
Education and CMSA Foundation
Executive Director

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