**AH 60**

**DLA 2: Professionalism in the Medical Healthcare Workplace**

If at any time, you have questions about how to complete any part of this DLA,

email them to: mdsc@lbcc.edu

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

* define the roles and responsibilities of a student in a medical healthcare field of study and those newly entering the health care profession
* describe the components of professionalism
* understand the importance of ethics and the protection of confidential information

**Warm-Up**:

Think about your experiences as a patient and as a student in a medical healthcare field of study, and answer the following questions:

1.) What qualities do you admire in medical healthcare professionals?

2.) Have you had any positive experiences as a patient before? Or, have you ever had any negative experiences? What were those experiences, and why have they stood out enough for you to remember them?

3.) Other than being trained and skilled, what qualities are important for a successful healthcare professional to have?

4.) In your own words, define the word “professionalism” and explain why it is important in this field.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

A practicum (clinical) is a real-life learning experience obtained through working on-site in a health care facility while enrolled as a student. It is one of the most important parts of your education, and it is an opportunity to apply what you’ve learned in the classroom in an actual healthcare setting. Keep one very important fact in mind – your role in a practicum is that of a ***student***, and you are there to learn and to hone your knowledge and skills.

Participating in a practicum is a privilege. Whether your practicum is in a hospital, physician’s practice, or clinical lab, you are also a ***guest*** in the facility. This means, the healthcare facility has invited you in to learn from them – they are not required to have you there. Just as when you are guest in someone’s home, the host can ask you to leave at any time. Thus, the site supervisor has the right to terminate your practicum at any time if he or she believes that your appearance, attitude, or performance negatively impacts the site’s patients, visitors, physicians, or other employees. Conversely, if you positively impact the organization, you might be offered an employment recommendation or opportunity once you complete your program.

Having the roles of a ***student*** and ***guest*** requires you to have certain responsibilities. As a ***student***, you are there to learn. Apply what you have learned in class and actively participate by getting involved and asking questions. As a ***guest***, you are representing the organization you are at. Make sure that you are dependable, your appearance is professional, that you have a good attitude, and that you provide excellent customer service.

5.) What other responsibilities might you have in your roles as a student in healthcare and as a guest at your practicum?

6.) Other than gaining on-site experience, can you think of any other benefits of participating in a practicum as part of your healthcare course? List as many as you are able.

It’s important to start developing your reputation now while you are a student. Take your studies seriously by applying yourself, honing your various skills, and making thoughtful decisions. Learn to manage your time well and find ways to balance the priorities in your life. Encourage and support your fellow classmates. *Remember that everything that you hear, observe, learn, and experience will be important at some point in your health care career.*

**SCENARIO 1**: Picture a practicum site with two students. One student is always visible, asking questions, stepping in to help, and taking notes. The other student is usually off someplace, socializing or using his/her phone. That student rarely asks questions, doesn’t show much initiative, and always has some reason why s/he has to leave early every week.

What do you expect to be the final outcome for each of the students, and why?

Once you begin working as a ***health care professional***, learning will continue to be a lifelong experience. As technology, medical research, and patient needs change, so will your responsibilities. You will need to continue learning so that you will be able to adjust and meet those important needs. Additionally, if you want to advance in your career, you will need to increase your responsibilities and further your formal education so that you will be prepared and qualified for the promotion.

What are ways in which you can continue learning once you are in the field? It will depend on the site you are working for. For instance, you might be required to attend on-site trainings or be sent to conferences. On your own, you can attend continuing education courses, join professional organizations, read professional healthcare journals and other reference materials, or speak to experienced colleagues.

7.) Use one of the Center computers to access the internet, and search for professional medical/healthcare organizations as well as professional healthcare journals. List a few of each that seem interesting to you.

Professional Medical/Healthcare Organizations: Professional Medical/Healthcare Journals:

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8.) The following criteria are the types of questions that might be considered when assigning your final course grade and for providing an employment reference. Consider each of the questions, and write why each is important on the lines provided below:

a.) Were you dependable?

Did you show up on time, ready to work? How many times were you absent? When absent, did you follow procedures for calling in?

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b.) Was your appearance professional?

Were you dressed appropriately, neat, and clean? Did your appearance reflect a positive image to your patients and to the site’s staff?

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c.) Did you display a friendly personality and provide good customer service?

Did you get along well with patients, physicians, and the site’s staff? Were you cooperative with the staff and a team player?

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d.) How well did you work under stress?

Did you maintain a calm demeanor and balance the priorities of your work appropriately? Were you flexible and adapt well to change?

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e.) How well did you perform your duties with limited supervision?

Did you demonstrate initiative or wait to be told what to do? Did you accept responsibility and perform your duties competently?

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f.) Did you display a positive attitude and a desire to learn?

Were you motivated? Did you ask good questions? Were you eager to learn new procedures and practice what you learned?

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g.) Did you display an overall professional image?

Did you do everything you could to give the very best impression of you?

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**Professionalism – *What* is it and *Why* is it Important?**

*Professionalism* is the skill, good judgment, and appropriate behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well. It is vital to succeed not only in healthcare, but in any profession.

Professionalism involves a state of mind, or a way of “being,” “knowing,” and “doing” that sets you apart from others. It gives direction to how you look, think, and act. It brings together who you are as a person, what you value, how you treat other people, what you contribute in the workplace, and how seriously you take your job. Professionals don’t just work to earn a paycheck. Income is important, but professionals view their work as a source of pride and a reflection of the role they play in society.

The following are characteristics of a person with a high degree of professionalism:

• Has Specialized Knowledge

First and foremost, professionals are known for their specialized knowledge and are extremely competent in what they do. They've made a deep, personal commitment to develop and continually improve their skills. They keep this knowledge up-to-date so that they can continue to deliver the best work possible.

• Has Critical Thinking Skills

Professionals are able to think critically. This means that they are able to use reasoning skills and evidence to make decisions, and can do so without being influenced by their emotions. Professionals will ask the right questions to get to the heart of the matter, identify and analyze important information, consider possible solutions, and then make a rational, logical conclusion to address the issue at hand.

**SCENARIO** **2**: A doctor mistakes you for a registered nurse and tells you to prepare a medication for him to administer to a patient. Even though you prepared medications in your previous job, preparation of this particular medication is not within the scope of practice for a medical assistant in your current job.

How would you respond in this scenario?

• Has a Strong Work Ethic

Professionals position their jobs as a high priority in their lives and make good decisions about how they approach their work. It means that they truly value their job, and actually see it as being more than a job, but an opportunity to help and make a difference in their patients’ lives. Professionals with a strong work ethic are punctual, reliable, and committed to what they do. They are also accountable, holding themselves responsible for their thoughts, words, and actions, especially when they have made a mistake. Other characteristics include having integrity (concerned about doing what is right, fair, and honest) and a good attitude.

• Has Self-Awareness/Self-Regulation

One of the challenges of working in a busy environment is avoiding distractions and not paying attention to unimportant things going on around you. This requires a certain degree of *self-awareness*, or an understanding of where you are, what you’re doing, and why you’re doing it. Professionals who are “present in the moment” can filter out distractions and are able to concentrate on what’s in front of them at any given time. This ability to focus is absolutely critical in avoiding mistakes. One of the best ways to reduce distractions at work is to avoid becoming a distraction yourself.

Professionals show respect for the people around them, no matter what their role is or what the situation is like. This requires a degree of *self-regulation,* or the ability to control one’s own emotions and behaviors. Professionals who are able to self-regulate are [emotionally intelligen](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_63.htm)t, considering the emotions and needs of others, and they don't let a bad day impact how they interact with colleagues, patients, or visitors. They also stay professional under pressure.

**SCENARIO 3**: You hear that a co-worker has been spreading gossip about you. You’re so angry that, as soon as she walks in the room, you want to tell her just what you think about her behavior.

How would you respond in this scenario?

• Positive Image

Professionals must work hard each and every day to do what is right and maintain the trust and respect of others, building a positive image of themselves or a positive reputation. They are a representative of the company that they work for, and their appearance, attitude, and behavior develops an image of the organization that patients, visitors, and staff see on a daily basis. Not only do professionals develop a positive inner image of themselves, but they also have a positive outer image to maintain. They don't show up to work sloppily dressed with unkempt hair. They're polished and they dress appropriately for the position.

• Positive Work Relationships

Your interactions with people and the relationships you form with co-workers are the basis for success in the workplace. This interdependence is essential; no one person can do it all, and only groups of people working together can get the job done and done *well*. Courtesy, etiquette, manners, cooperation, and loyalty are key factors in a professional work environment. Remember the Golden Rule: Treat other people the way you want to be treated.

**SCENARIO 4**: A new person joins your work group. He’s much older than everyone else, and no one seems to like him. It’s time to go to lunch and your co-workers leave him behind.

How would you respond in this scenario?

9.) What characteristics of a professional do you already possess?

10.) What characteristics of a professional do you need to develop? How can you go about in doing so?

Professionalism is important because although hands-on technical skills remain a high priority, good character, a strong work ethic, and personal and professional traits and behaviors are becoming more important than ever before. Statistics indicate a growing concern with theft, fraud, and behavioral problems in the workplace. Poor attendance, interpersonal conflicts, disregard for quality, and disrespect for authority oftentimes lead to employees being fired from their jobs. With a growing emphasis on customer service, patient satisfaction, cultural competence, quality improvement, patient safety, and corporate compliance, health care employers are increasingly seeking workers with strong “soft skills” and “people skills” – people who communicate appropriately, work well on teams, respect and value differences, use limited resources efficiently, and interact effectively with co-workers, patients, and visitors.

Professionalism is also important to avoid errors. In the health care field, errors can cause permanent damage to a patient or even be fatal. Having the abilities such as staying current with newest health care trends and equipment, focusing on the task at hand, or knowing when to ask for help can make a very big difference in the quality of care that you provide to your patients and in your work with those around you.

**Ethics and Patient Confidentiality:**

Our ethics, or morals and principles that we have which help us understand what is right and dictates our behavior, are especially important in health care. If we behave ethically, we will behave in accordance with laws and the organization’s rules, policies, and procedures. Ignoring a rule, violating a policy, or breaking the law can compromise the quality of our work, hurt a patient or co-worker, and get us fired from our job.

11.) What happens if employees don’t wear their identification badges at work, share private business matters or confidential patient information, or attempt to perform duties beyond their scope of practice? Who is impacted?

12.) What can you do to ensure that you comply with all of the rules, policies, and procedures at the place of your employment?

**SCENARIO 5**: The office manager tells you to enter a code on an insurance form that she knows is incorrect. If you enter the incorrect code as she has told you to do, the clinic will receive more money from the insurance company.

What should you do if you see a co-worker behaving unethically?

A major part of compliance in health care is protecting the confidentiality of patients’ medical records. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) established national standards for this purpose. Protecting confidentiality has become even more critical with the advent of electronic medical records. The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act was signed into law in February 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Portions of the HITECH Act address the confidentiality of health information transmitted electronically and strengthen the enforcement and penalties associated with HIPAA rules.

Wherever you work, it is important to make sure that you understand what each organization specifically does to protect confidential information, and that you comply with HIPAA and the HITECH Act to prevent the inappropriate (and even accidental) disclosure of confidential information. Doing so will help to avoid potential fines against you *and* your employer. Also, make sure that you maintain the confidentiality of financial information and other materials your employers deem private. If you work for more than one health care company at the same time or move from employer to employer, it’s important not to share private information among employers.

13.) Why is protecting patient information important?

**SCENARIO 6:** You need to analyze data on 100 patients and create a report. The database you will be using has Social Security numbers, addresses, and other sensitive information about patients. The deadline to submit the report is just a week away, and you have several other things to do between now and then. If you save the data on a flash drive, you can work on the project at home.

How would you respond in this scenario?

Regardless of what type of job you are preparing for and will build your career in, you will play an important role in health care because *every* job and *every* worker is very important. Professionalism is vital in every job, and it is up to you to bring together the mixture of knowledge, skills, compassion, and commitment required to make you the very best employee and co-worker that you can possibly be.

14.) Now that you’ve completed this DLA, write below how you plan to use or implement the information.

15.) What questions do you have about professionalism as a healthcare professional?

You are well on your way to finding success in AH 60 and all of your classes! To **receive credit** for completing this assignment, you will participate in an online follow-up session with a Center staff member. Go to the “Follow-up Sessions” tab on the Multidisciplinary Student Success Center Online Supplemental Learning Assistance site: <http://www.lbcc.edu/SuccessCenters/mdsc/> to schedule your online appointment with a Center staff member.



**Resources:**

Makely, S., Austin, V.J., and Kester, Q. (2013). *Professionalism in health care, 4th Edition.* Upper Saddle River,

NJ: Pearson.

Mind Tools (2014). Professionalism, developing this vital characteristic. *Mind Tools.* Retrieved from:

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/ article/professionalism.htm