

Profiles of professionalism

Periodically it is good to consider what it means to be a health care professional and what society expects or demands of us in return. This is one of those times.

The characteristic of professionalism (or leadership, or success, or community responsibility) I wish to consider today is education. Not your personal education, but the education of others. One of the primary obligations of all people in all societies is to insure that our children receive a better education than we did.

I believe that knowledge of all types is good; that honor, personal integrity, morality, ethics, and honesty are the bedrock of a stable society and a happy life; and that we all bear responsibility to promulgate those attributes in ourselves, our families, our associates, and our societies. As members of the healing fraternity, we have a profound obligation to demonstrate those characteristics. Every society around the globe honors its healers, and in return we should strive to exhibit the best traits of humanity.

The issue of providing good education to our children is global, and at any given time well more than half of the world is engaged in spirited debate over how, when, and what we should teach our children. All of us with advanced education must join these debates, because our futures and the futures of our children are at stake. Those who argue for restrictive education of any sort stand in the way of the greatest of human pursuits—intellectual growth and maturity.

If we begin with the end result in mind, it becomes more obvious why broad education is so important. In my mind, that end result is a community, society, nation, or world in which every individual functions at the level of competent independence. That is, we each take personal responsibility for ourselves, our families, and our communities. Development of this characteristic requires education, which, when broadly based, develops the personal discipline and focus to understand and accept diversity, and to mature to maximum potential.

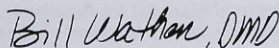
What, then, are the core issues that academic endeavors should embrace? First would be the nurturing of two fundamental traits in our children: inquisitiveness and critical evaluation, or as some have called it,

curiosity and healthy skepticism. After the early learning required for alphabet and numbers comprehension, four essential areas of knowledge must be mastered: (1) the humanities (art, in all forms, and literature), which deal with communication among people; (2) science, which deals with the physical world we live in; (3) sociology, which deals with human interaction and history; and (4) philosophy, which deals with the world's theologies and spiritual concerns.

Why should we who comprise the dental field be concerned about these things? Because failed or incomplete education produces stenotic individuals who inevitably tend to intrude upon the freedom of others through ignorance and presumption. In some people, there is an opportunity for growth and change. In the majority, however, the potential for pervasive evil is great. History clearly reveals that force and bureaucracy are ineffective against presumptive arrogance and ignorance. Only educated self-enlightenment has been proven to cure those conditions.

We all must be engaged with our educational systems, for our entire lifetimes. We must talk with teachers and administrators of our school systems. We must volunteer for supportive roles and run for elections to the boards and committees that determine what, when, and how our children shall learn. We must speak out against biased and repressive tendencies that would limit or distort what our children learn. We must actively support those who work for broad worldwide education and oppose those who would limit what our children learn. Open, learned debate is the best cure for misinformation.

Remain deeply engaged with your external community at all levels. No matter how much you contribute, you will reap more.



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