

Professional and Personal Development: Professionalism, Leadership, and Effective Communication Skills

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify the key features of a continuing professional development system.
2. Compare the interrelated topics of professionalism, leadership, and effective communication skills for leading others.

ABSTRACT

Continuing professional development is a lifelong process of self-directed learning to broaden one's knowledge. Within the medical laboratory science profession, continuing professional development promotes broadening of professional and personal knowledge and skills. This introductory article provides an overview of the interrelated topics of professionalism, leadership, and effective communication skills for leading others.

ABBREVIATIONS: ASCLS - American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science, CE - continuing education, CPD - continuing professional development, IOM - Institute of Medicine.

INDEX TERMS: continuing education, continuing professional development, professionalism, leadership, communication.

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INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) Code of Ethics, medical laboratory professionals have a duty to (1) the patient to provide high quality care, (2) colleagues and the profession to ultimately advance the profession, and (3) society to globally improve patient healthcare outcomes.¹ These duties are underpinned by the concept of professional development. Professional development provides medical

laboratory professionals the opportunity to maintain and develop their knowledge and skills necessary for the evolving clinical laboratory to ensure the provision of high-quality patient care.

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a "Redesigning Continuing Education in the Health Professions" report.² This report was the result of an IOM committee that was charged with examining the continuing education (CE) methods/systems for healthcare professionals in the United States. The committee defined CE, a form of professional development, as "the process by which health professionals keep up to date with the latest knowledge and advances in health care."² The committee described CE as a means to strengthen the healthcare workforce and as critical component to "improve health care quality and patient safety."²

Within the report, the committee determined that there are flaws in the current CE systems and that the country should move toward a system of continuing professional development (CPD).² CPD consists of learning over a lifetime and shifts the control of learning to the individual. CE is primarily "teacher-driven, focuses on clinical education, and predominantly builds on education theory," whereas CPD "encourages systematic maintenance, self-directed improvement, and broadening of knowledge and skills."² The CPD concept has been embraced by other countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom; however, it is relatively new in the United States.

The next three articles provide the medical laboratory professional with an opportunity for CPD on the interrelated topics of professionalism, leadership, and effective communication skills for leading others. These topics were selected as CPD involves not only educational activities to enhance scientific skills but also soft (interpersonal, social, communication) skills.³ Many articles within *Clinical Laboratory Science* advance the scientific knowledge of medical laboratory professionals; however, the authors of this Focus Series took a less scientific direction to share knowledge on three areas that can be beneficial in both professional and personal lives.

Professionalism

The "Professions, Professionalism and Professional Identity" article discusses relevant professionalism topics, such as the fundamental characteristics of a profession, development of a professional identity, and approaches for teaching professionalism. Medical laboratory science

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is considered a profession as it possesses the five fundamental characteristics of a profession that include: a body of knowledge, professional authority, society authorization, a code of ethics, and a specific culture.⁴ Professionalism, a component of any profession, is a continual learning process that is developed by our academic and work experiences. As medical laboratory professionals enter and practice in the profession, a professional identity, “a term used to describe both the collective identity of a profession and an individual’s own sense of the professional role,” is also fostered.⁵

To assist in the CPD of professionalism, incorporation of a specific professionalism curriculum in medical laboratory technician and medical laboratory science academic programs would be beneficial. In order to accomplish this, educators could model curriculum already developed by other healthcare disciplines, introduce opportunities for reflective experiences, and provide mentoring programs. Specific areas of professionalism to focus on would include communication skills, team building, and duty to colleagues and society. Incorporation of the above does complement the IOM’s committee goal of producing professional healthcare workers that are consistently prepared to provide high quality patient care.

Leadership

Leadership has been studied for centuries, thus the literature has an abundance of leadership approaches, research, and theories. The “Leadership: A Practical Approach” article will present five approaches to leadership as follows: (1) trait approach, (2) servant-leadership, (3) transactional approach, (4) transformational approach, and (5) team leadership. For those new to leadership theories, these selected five approaches provide a blend of historical and common/popular leadership approaches.

Leadership skills can be acquired and developed. Effective leaders continually strive to develop their skills through a variety of methods. Development strategies include professional leadership programs/workshops, academic courses, personal growth and research (eg, reading leadership articles and books), and assessment of leadership abilities (followed by actions for improvement). A blend of these development strategies will result in growth of one’s leadership abilities internal or external to healthcare.

Effective Communication Skills for Leading Others

Leadership and management are different yet similar processes of focusing a group of individuals to reach a common goal. Regardless of whether one is leading or

managing, effective communication skills are needed to ensure goals are met. Presented in the “Communication Skills for Leading and Managing Others” article is an overview of communication studies including forms of communication, models of communication, and the communication process. Development of communication skills is not limited to leaders or managers as communication is incorporated into all components of our lives thus impacting personal and professional lives.

To further expand on the importance of developing communication skills, information on coaching employees and managing conflict is provided. Leaders and managers have opportunities to coach others and encounter conflicts at work that must be resolved. Successful coaching of employees does require strong communication skills. Resolving conflict will also require effective communication; however, it may also negate conflict that can arise from poor communication.

CONCLUSION

As healthcare professionals, and in order to continually strive to comply with the ASCLS Code of Ethics, we must participate in CPD. This development does not exclude the three interrelated topics of professionalism, leadership, and effective communication skills for leading others. The goal of these articles is to provide a better understanding of these topics to the general readership of *Clinical Laboratory Science* and to promote continual development of professionalism, leadership, and communication skills. All medical laboratory professionals, regardless of age (as we are all lifelong learners), education, geographic location, title, or work environment should strive to develop these skills as much as our scientific knowledge in order to provide the best quality of healthcare possible and to improve patient outcomes.

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