

Report of a Working Party of the Royal College of Physicians of London, December 2005

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- *integrity*
- *compassion*
- *altruism*
- *continuous improvement*
- *excellence*
- *working in partnership with members of the wider healthcare team.*

These values, which underpin the science and practice of medicine, form the basis for a moral contract between the medical profession and society. Each party has a duty to work to strengthen the system of healthcare on which our collective human dignity depends.'

Each word in the description has been carefully considered and justified. Reasons for not including other words, such as mastery, autonomy, competence and art, are also clearly explained.

The Working Party makes a number of recommendations relevant to leadership, teamwork, education, appraisal, career paths and research, all with the intention of promoting professionalism.

In New Zealand we have made some progress in some of these areas and may be a little ahead of the game with respect to vocational registration and maintenance of standards, quality improvement activities, critical incident management and the handling of complaints about medical practice, but we still have a long way to go.

As someone who has been concerned about professionalism in medicine for many years I can do no better than repeat the first two recommendations of the Working Party: That each doctor reflect on the Working Party's definition and description of medical professionalism, recognising that he or she is a role model for doctors and other health professionals...and that they take responsibility for ensuring that this aspirational standard of modern professionalism is met in their daily practice.

Tony Townsend
Editor, NZFP

In response to these and other concerns that have impacted on professionalism in medicine, the Royal College of Physicians of London set up a working party to define the nature and role of medical professionalism in modern society. They spent nine months interviewing people and receiving submissions and published their report in this 54-page publication in December 2005.

The Working Party defines medical professionalism as follows:

'Medical professionalism signifies a set of values, behaviours, and relationships that underpins the trust the public has in doctors.'

They describe this in more detail:

'Medicine is a vocation in which doctor's knowledge, clinical skills, and judgement are put in the service of protecting and restoring human well-being. This purpose is realised through a partnership between patient and doctor, one based on mutual respect, individual responsibility, and appropriate accountability.'

In their day-to-day practice, doctors are committed to: