Suitability for the Practice of Medicine

Background and Oversight

Granting of the M.D. degree signifies that the holder is a physician prepared to enter postgraduate education for the practice of Medicine and to care for patients.

Medical students who fail to maintain appropriate professional behavior and/or adequate academic performance will be subject to review, potential disciplinary action where relevant, and possible dismissal from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (P&S).

Professionalism is a key determinant of a physician’s ability to provide safe, high quality care to patients, and protecting the safety of patients is the overriding concern of the Faculty of Medicine at P&S and the Faculty.

At P&S, the Fundamentals Faculty Committee and Clinical Faculty Committee oversee the progress of students through the curriculum. These Committees are charged with determining a medical student’s suitability for the practice of Medicine.

Domains of Professionalism

To grant the M.D. degree, the Faculty of the College of Physicians & Surgeons must be assured that students demonstrate competency in the general competencies of a physician (AAMC PCRS), including the following domains of professionalism:

[P1] Demonstrate compassion, integrity, and respect for others

- Students must treat others with fairness and respect, work collaboratively and help fellow students whenever appropriate in their shared pursuit of learning and optimal patient care.
- Students must assure the accuracy and completeness of their contributions to the medical record and must make a good-faith effort to provide the best possible patient care.
- Students must be willing to admit errors and must not purposefully mislead others.
- Students are bound to know, understand and preserve professional ethics and have a duty to report any breach of these ethics by other students or health care providers through the appropriate channels.
- Students must not cheat, plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, misrepresent their work, falsify data or assist others in the commission of these acts.
- Students must not copy notes in the medical record, copy notes from house staff or faculty, paraphrase an author’s ideas or work without proper citation.

[P3] Demonstrate respect for patient privacy and autonomy

- Students must protect the security of confidential, sensitive and protected patient information (digital and paper-based).
- Students must only access patient Electronic Medical Records and other Protected Health Information for patients they are following, cross covering or have directly encountered with their team as part of their clinical clerkships, electives and selectives. They are
permitted continued access after the patient is discharged from the hospital, transferred to
another service or when the student rotates off service, as part of the student’s medical
education at P&S.

- Students must be knowledgeable about and abide by [HIPAA policies](https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/index.html) and utilize only
Columbia University email systems for patient and Columbia matters. They must not
auto-forward Columbia University email to Gmail and other unapproved email
systems. Students must encrypt portable devices, e.g. laptops and USB drives, etc., used
to store patient or individual research data, and encrypt data files with Protected Health
Information (PHI) if stored on a portable device that is not encrypted.

- Students must not take photos or videos of patients except for purposes of documentation
in the medical record, and then, only with prior written consent of the respective
institution, and when possible, of the patient. Such images must not leave CUMC on a
student’s electronic device and may not be transmitted in any way other than from one
approved email system to another approved email system and only to those caring for the
patient.

- Students must not post images or other patient information on social networking sites, the
internet, or anywhere else.

**[P4] Demonstrate accountability to patients, society, and the profession**

- Students must abstain from using any substance in a manner that could compromise
patient care. They must never use alcohol or drugs in public wearing clothing or ID that
identifies them as student physicians.

- Students must protect the public from an impaired colleague and assist a colleague whose
capability is impaired because of ill health. Students are thus obligated to report persons
of the health care team whose behavior exhibits impairment or lack of professional
conduct or competence or who engage in fraud or deception. Such reports must conform
to established institutional policies.

- Students must be punctual, reliable and conscientious in fulfilling their professional
duties, including attendance at required lectures, small groups, and at examinations,
timely completion of assignments, and fulfillment of all parts of all clinical courses.

- Students must maintain a neat and clean appearance with dress and attire that is accepted
as professional.

- Students must not use offensive language, gestures, or remarks with sexual overtones.

- Students must abstain from romantic involvement with patients or their family members
while serving on a patient’s medical team, and abstain from romantic involvement with
residents and faculty in positions of authority while serving in a student role. Sexual
misconduct including sexual harassment and sexual assault are unacceptable behaviors
and are reported to the Columbia University Title IX office.

- Students must strive to maintain composure under pressure of fatigue, professional stress
or personal problems.

- Students must seek supportive services when appropriate.

- Students must always be supervised in the clinical environment and seek additional
supervision if they find themselves inadequately supervised because of lack of
knowledge and/or insufficient experience. Students are expected to recognize when they
need additional consultation and supervision in the clinical setting and seek it
accordingly.
Students must seek feedback and actively participate in the process of evaluating their teachers (faculty as well as house staff). Students are expected to respond to feedback by appropriate modification of their behavior. When evaluating faculty performance, students are obliged to provide prompt, constructive comments. Evaluations should maintain the same considerate, professional tone expected of faculty when they evaluate student performance.

Students authoring research reports must be well-enough acquainted with the work of any co-workers that they can vouch for the integrity of the study and validity of the findings and must have been active in the research itself.

While in public, students represent the medical profession, Columbia University and the College of Physicians and Surgeons and are expected to comport themselves responsibly.

[P5] Demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness to a diverse patient population, including but not limited to diversity in gender, age, culture, race, religion, disabilities, and sexual orientation

- Students must not refuse to participate in the care of a patient based on the patient’s race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Students must not refuse to participate in the care of a patient solely because of medical risk, or perceived risk to the student. Students retain the right of “conscience exemption” from performance of or participation in procedures or practices that violate their core moral, ethical and/or religious beliefs. Patient care assignments for students with medical conditions placing them at undue risk will be addressed in an individualized manner.

[P6] Demonstrate a commitment to ethical principles pertaining to provision or withholding of care, confidentiality, informed consent, and business practices, including compliance with relevant laws, policies, and regulations

- Students must abide by all P&S and Columbia University policies and procedures, as well as all Hospital policies where they are assigned, and be familiar with the policies. Students must obey all local, State and Federal laws at all times.

Violations of these standards are considered to be very serious breaches of professional conduct.