Personal Identities, Professional Identity Formation, and Implications for Physician Professionalism

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Name as Identity
Commonly Heard First Words

I thought you were a woman physician.
Patient-Physician Concordance

• Studies examining the effect of gender and racial concordance in the patient-physician relationship have revealed mixed results.

• Even if the effects are positive, it is infeasible to achieve gender and racial concordance across every patient-physician interaction and relationship.

• Even if it was feasible, there are certain patient requests for concordance that should not be fulfilled.
Personal and Professional Identities

- **Personal Identity Attributes**
  - Gender
  - Race
  - Religion

- **Professional Identity Attributes**
Professional Identity Formation (PIF)

• Within medical education, PIF is a multi-faceted process by which medical students transition from laypersons to physicians.

• From a physician’s perspective, PIF is the process of internalizing a profession’s core values and beliefs.

• From a patient’s perspective, PIF is how these internalized values and beliefs manifest in a physician’s professional obligations.
Establishing Ethical Norms and Obligations
When Personal Beliefs and Professional Obligations Do Not Overlap

Personal Beliefs

Professional Obligations
Religious Influence on Medical Practice

My religious beliefs influence my practice of medicine

- Indonesia, 2010
- Congo, 2012
- Austria, 2014
- India, 2012
- USA, 2002
- Germany Munich Perinatal, 2014
- Germany Munich Turkish, 2016
- Denmark, 2012

Legend:
- Dark green: Strongly agree
- Yellow: Agree
- Orange: Disagree
- Red: Strongly disagree

percent
Ethical Opinion 1.1.7
Physician Exercise of Conscience

• Physicians are:

  • *expected to uphold the ethical norms of their profession, but*
  • *they are not defined solely by their profession, and thus*
  • *should have latitude to practice in accord with well-considered, deeply held personal beliefs.*

• Preserving opportunity to act (or to refrain from acting) in accordance with conscience is important for preserving the integrity of the individual physician and the medical profession.
Limits to Exercising Conscience

• Physicians are expected to:
  • provide care in emergencies, and
  • honor patients’ decisions to refuse life-sustaining treatment.

• Physicians have stronger obligations to:
  • patients with whom they have a longstanding relationship;
  • when there is imminent risk of patient harm such as due to delay in needed care;
  • and when the patient is not able to access needed treatment from another physician.
When Exercising Conscience

• Before entering into a relationship, make clear to patients any specific services you cannot provide in good conscience.

• Take care that your actions do not discriminate against individual patients or populations of patients.

• Inform patients about all relevant options for treatment, including options to which you morally object to.

• In general, you should refer a patient to another to provide treatment you decline to offer.
Thank You for the Opportunity