

Letter to Mark Kuczewski from Myles Sheehan

Mark Kuczewski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine and Director,
Neisswanger Institute for Bioethics and Health Policy
Stritch School of Medicine

August 25, 2000

Dear Mark:

Thank you for your willingness to chair a committee looking at issues in the professional development of our students and professionalism at Stritch School of Medicine.

Attached please find a set of goals that I would like you and your committee to address as you meet over the next few months. My hope is for a set of recommendations no later than January 1, 2001. Some of the goals are very specific and focused like the development of a student honor code and a policy statement that will guide the development of a process for addressing the appropriate treatment of students. Some of the goals are large, like engaging the larger Loyola University Medical Center community, and will require a process longer than the next four months. We can consider the best route to further the committee's work beyond that time after the recommendations are prepared.

I will share this letter and goals with the Central Curricular Authority (CCA) and its chair, Dr. Paul Hering. Appropriately, materials related to the curricular development of objectives in professionalism are part of the task of the CCA and its Design Subcommittee. I will ask the CCA to appoint a member to be part of your committee and ask that any curricular recommendations be considered by the Design Subcommittee of the CCA.

I also believe the issue of professionalism and the professional development of our students is larger than curriculum. That is why I want this project to be in close contact with the CCA but not a subcommittee project of the CCA. Regrettably, I fear too many view professionalism as something that our students should be forced to acquire without paying careful attention to the overall institutional environment and how it supports professional growth and behavior. We need to look at the obligations professionalism demands from faculty, both medical and basic science, resident physicians, other health care professionals, and administrators. I also feel it is time that the message be delivered that we must stop complaining about student and resident misbehavior or professional lapses without recognizing that there is sometimes an unfortunate tolerance of unprofessional behavior among faculty. In other words, students and residents get lots of messages. We can be blue in the face developing policy and curriculum for students and residents about high ideals and values, but unless we demand high standards from those who are charged with being role models, leaders, and teachers, then this project is worthless.

There are two other points I would ask you and the committee to consider carefully. The first is to look at sources from Loyola's Jesuit heritage that emphasize the obligation to care for the poor and serve those most in need as one of the characteristics of Jesuit training. Dedicated service to those who otherwise would be neglected should be part of what Stritch means when it talks about professionalism. Otherwise, the tendency to self-serving models of professionalism can be real. My second request, especially when looking at a policy on appropriate treatment of students as well as an honor code, is not to neglect the role of mercy and forgiveness. Egregious behavior must be punished. But good people occasionally do bad things. That does not mean that "anything goes" but it does mean that our models of honor, appropriate treatment, and professional behavior should not be rigid, more attuned to political currents than true virtue, or be punitive when people have a bad day, say something incredibly stupid, or unwittingly hurt another person by an insensitive comment. I want a framework for mutual respect, education, growth, and measured corrective response.

Thanks again for your contribution to this project.

Sincerely,

Myles N. Sheehan, S.J., M.D.
Senior Associate Dean, Education Program
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