



## Canadian Association of Radiologists White Paper Professionalism in Radiology

### Introduction

The Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR) is the national voice of radiologists. The Association is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of care, promoting patient safety, and helping radiologists contribute to the very best health care for patients. Radiology is what we do; professionals are who we are.

When a patient is in need of care and the shift is over, a professional doesn't go home. When a patient needs an advocate, a professional is ready and willing navigating difficult waters. When a patient is uncertain and scared of what their future holds, a professional brings competent, trusted, advice. When the system as a whole does not meet the needs of the patient, the professional works tirelessly in a collaborative manner until it does. This is what professionalism means to the patient.

The CAR is our professional organization. For the CAR, it is vital to clearly articulate the importance of professionalism in radiology, because the concept is at the centre of a constellation of the activities that the CAR engages in on behalf of its members. Furthermore, adherence to the basic principles of professionalism guides the patient care and radiology services that our members provide. In a time when the delivery of health services is under pressure to commoditize health care delivery, it is even more important to emphasize that the responsibility of all physicians, including radiologists, is first and foremost to our patients.

### Outline

The following white paper lays out what a standard of professionalism entails for radiologists.

- I. Defining Professionalism
- II. Perspectives on Professionalism
- III. Social Contract – The Role and Value of Radiologists
- IV. A Focus on Patients
- V. Quality of Care
- VI. Stewardship & Technology

What happens if you fail to meet the obligations under the social contract? Canadians will change that contract and redefine professionalism for you. Regulations and changes will be forced upon you—quite possibly in forms that diminish or remove your self-regulatory privilege.

One of the best ways for you and for men and women in any profession to avoid having change forced upon you is to relentlessly embrace new ideas, tenaciously set and reach higher standards and, most importantly, passionately strive to ensure your profession serves the public good.

Governor General David Johnston

Commencement Speech to Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, 2012

## Defining Professionalism

Professionalism is the basis of the implicit contract between society and the medical profession, granting the privilege of physician-led regulation with the understanding that physicians are accountable to those served, to society, to their profession, and to themselves. The medical profession is characterized by a strong commitment to the well-being of patients, high standards of ethical conduct, mastery of an ever-expanding body of knowledge and skills, and a high level of clinical independence. The Canadian Medical Association has articulated that “as individuals, physicians’ personal values may vary, but as members of the medical profession they are expected to share and uphold those values that characterize the practice of medicine and the care of patients.”<sup>1</sup>

Professionalism in radiology extends not only to the clinical work of accurate interpretations of diagnostic studies, but also to the value that only a radiologist, delivering services across the spectrum of professional responsibilities, can bring to an organization. This value includes the evaluation of professional competency, the management of adverse events, radiation safety, leadership in education and research, and the interactive contribution of expertise and feedback between the radiologist and other professionals and technical staff. Radiologists are also likely to be found leading quality improvement and quality assurance programs that promote effective monitoring and improvement regarding patient outcomes.

Professionalism also intrinsically promotes constructive debate about how to organize and deliver care. Professionals are called “to jointly declare (“profess”) what the public and individual patients can expect regarding shared competency standards and ethical values to implement trustworthy means to ensure that all medical professionals live up to these promises.”<sup>2</sup> Professionalism has been conceptualized, defined, and put into practice as a guiding tenet of the physicians’ daily work by numerous other medical and radiology associations, including the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, the American College of Radiology, and the Radiological Society of North America.

## Perspectives on Professionalism

The Royal College has identified professionalism as one of the CanMEDS roles.<sup>3</sup> Physicians are expected to fulfill their role as professionals by reflecting society’s expectation that they be: clinically competent, committed to

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Medical Association. CMA Policy: Medical Professionalism. Ottawa: Canadian Medical Association, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Wynia MK, Papdakis MA, Sullivan WM, Hafferty FW. More than a list of values and desired behaviors: a foundational understanding of medical professionalism. *Acad Med* 2014;89:712-4.

<sup>3</sup> CanMEDS is a framework for improving patient care by enhancing physician training. Developed by the Royal College in the 1990s, its main purpose is to define the necessary competencies for all areas of medical practice and provide a comprehensive foundation for medical education and practice in Canada. CanMEDS identifies and describes the abilities physicians require to effectively meet the

ongoing professional development, promote the public good, adhere to ethical standards, and demonstrate values such as integrity, honesty, altruism, humility, respect for diversity and transparency with respect to potential conflicts of interest.<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Medical Association has urged physicians not only to be involved in discussions about medical professionalism, but also to take a leading role.<sup>5</sup> In the preamble to its modules on professionalism, the RSNA makes clear that the concept encompasses a set of beliefs and values that demonstrate a commitment to competence that places the interests of patients above those of the physician, while facilitating the setting and maintenance of standards related to ethics, scientific knowledge, and communication.<sup>6</sup>

Adherence to the tenets of professionalism is particularly important in light of the pressures on radiologists and the healthcare system as a whole. These can be financial, resource-based, bureaucratic, or related to instances of unprofessional conduct on the part of one's peers. Additionally, innovative, potentially disruptive technologies loom large in the day-to-day work of radiologists. Differentiating the art of diagnosis and inter-professional communication from the technology of the image generation and interpretation is essential to articulating and solidifying the role and value of radiologists as part of healthcare teams. The presence of technology and social media in the delivery of health services has the potential to alter the physician-patient relationship. As professionals, radiologists must recognize and reconcile technological change with their duty to care for their patients. The needs of the patient are central to professionalism, as is the inherent human connection and bond of trust forged between the physician and the patient.

## **Social Contract – The Role and Value of Radiologists**

The social contract between radiologists and the public hinges on the value of radiology, and the place of medical imaging in the continuum of accurate diagnosis and subsequent optimal patient care. Radiologists are integral to patient care, but not always fully understood by government agencies, regional health authorities, or professional colleagues. If radiologists are to be effective in our patient centred advocacy efforts, and if they want to properly convey the essential contribution to patient care in a variety of settings, it is essential that

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health care needs of the people they serve. These abilities are grouped thematically under seven roles. A competent physician seamlessly integrates the competencies of all seven CanMEDS Roles, one of which is Professional.

<sup>4</sup> Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. CanMEDS Role: Professional. Accessed 10 February 2017.

<http://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/canmeds/framework/canmeds-role-professional-e>

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Medical Association. Medical Professionalism. Accessed 8 February 2017. <https://www.cma.ca/En/Pages/medical-professionalism.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Radiological Society of North America. RSNA Statement on Professionalism. Accessed 22 March 2017.

<https://www.rsna.org/Professionalism/>



radiology be understood as more than an expensive line-item on hospital and health region budgets, but as an integral professional component in proper diagnosis and treatment.

The CAR emphasizes the responsibility of radiologists as physicians and recognizes the importance of the physician-patient relationship. The emphasis on the management of the volume of radiology procedures without the requisite focus on value will result may have adverse clinical outcomes to individual patients. Healthcare organizations are under pressure to ensure that there is value for dollars. Without ethical professional practice, the search for lower cost as the only measurable outcome puts patients at risk. Radiologists are duty-bound to model ethical behaviour and to expect it from their colleagues. Professionalism requires recognizing and responding to ethical issues encountered in practice, while managing and mitigating conflicts of interest. Upholding the social contract requires a level of professional integrity that is manifested in all aspects of a physician's practice and professional life. Thus it is crucial to ensure that attention to value retains core professional principles. Economic pressures necessitate that the CAR reinforce and promote the importance of ethical and professional practice.

## A Focus on Patients

Patient care is the *raison d'être* for medical imaging. For radiologists, the growing concern about the possible commoditization of imaging work through tendered contracting arises from a related concern that the primary focus could shift to competition on price base solely on the volume of studies interpreted. The CAR is cognisant of the importance of cost containment but maintains that it must be in the context of a patient-centered approach. Radiologists, as integral members of the healthcare team, add measurable value to medical care and have a responsibility to ensure that the delivery of medical imaging services prioritizes the patient.<sup>7</sup>

The CAR and its radiologist members promote the timeliness of interpretation, and contribute to initiatives that reduce wait times and enhanced access to care. Additionally, the CAR advocates for the appropriate use of medical imaging. It does so by participating in programs and embracing technology that will ensure that the right study is performed at the right time, for every patient. Radiologists who fully embody this facet of professionalism use their expertise on a regular basis to liaise with their colleagues from other specialties and to act in a consultative role to ensure that the appropriateness of imaging studies. When radiologists are

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<sup>7</sup> Abhi Bhandari and Thy Dinh. *The Value of Radiology in Canada*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2017, p. 19.

empowered to consult with their colleagues, they can facilitate the optimal and efficient use of health system resources.

## Quality of Care

As a matter of professionalism, radiologists have a responsibility to participate in and champion efforts by their colleagues from within their own domain as well other health professions to improve the health system. It is professionalism that guides systemic quality improvement in patient safety, innovation in radiation protection and monitoring, utilization control and peer review. Self-regulation and self-guided initiatives to improve the quality of care and patient experience are an integral aspect of professionalism in radiology.

The Canadian Association of Radiologists participates in the regulation and maintenance of quality standards as a matter of professionalism on behalf of its members. Radiologists share their clinical expertise and experience, and participate in life-long learning initiatives supported by the CAR. Radiologists affiliated with and acting through the CAR promote societal benefit through collaboration with organizations such as the Royal College, by leading quality assurance programs, and promoting best practices.

## Stewardship and Technology

The role of the radiologist in the hospital or clinic has always been to make the best possible use of an array of technological tools. From the X-ray at the dawn of the twentieth century through to more recent innovations such as 3D tomosynthesis, radiologists have always been at the forefront of technological change and use in medicine. A central aspect of professionalism in radiology is a responsibility to their patients to ensure that new and appropriate technologies are leveraged to ensure quality improvements and enhancements to patient care. Radiologists have a responsibility in the stewardship of often-scarce healthcare resources by promoting and participating in initiatives to enhance appropriateness.

When used optimally, innovative diagnostic imaging under the guidance and expertise of radiologists results in earlier diagnosis of disease, earlier treatment, faster discharge from hospital, timely patient and family reassurance, and greater confidence of clinicians in the management of patient symptoms and concerns. The value of radiology is demonstrated by the ability to maximize the effectiveness of diagnostic imaging technology and to improve the timeliness and accuracy of diagnosis while minimizing unnecessary (and inappropriate)

utilization of these tools.<sup>8</sup> There is no other single medical specialty that has the knowledge and skills necessary for this task.

## Conclusion

The CAR understands the central role of professionalism for radiologists in the context of a self-regulated profession. The role of the CAR is not that of a regulator. Recognizing, promoting, and embodying the tenets of medical professionalism is essential for all physicians, but particularly relevant for radiologists because of the fundamental role of diagnostic imaging in current medical care. The role of the CAR is in communicating and articulating what professional organizations bring to patient care and to maintain professionalism in an environment that is experiencing increased pressure to commoditize image interpretation. It is imperative that the CAR, in its role as the voice of radiologists, maintains an active and observable role in communicating to radiologists, government agencies and patients the importance of professionalism.

### *Keys to Professionalism for Radiologists*

- Articulate the value of radiology while upholding the social contract
- Keep the patient at the centre of the workflow and consultation process
- Share clinical expertise to enhance quality of care
- Make optimal use of technology to ensure appropriate care for every patient

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<sup>8</sup> Bhandari and Dinh, *The Value of Radiology in Canada*, p. 2.