SLIDE 1 **Professionalism**

Professions are occupations that require special knowledge or skills and are usually held in high regard by society. Members of a profession are expected to be committed to integrity, and they are expected to be competent and dedicated to the public good. As a result of these high standards, society places a great deal of trust in professional organizations and associations, allowing them to set standards and granting them oversight of their members.

Professions tend to develop their own culture within the broader social culture in which they operate. As a culture, professions develop a distinctive language, symbols, and traditions that assist members in effectively doing their work. This shared culture not only adds to the efficiency of members, it also binds them together with a common purpose and instills in them a set of common values.

SLIDE 2 **Professionalism**

The field of ethics underlies the core of professionalism. Much of the value that society places on professionals comes from the high expectations of knowledge, ability, honesty, and integrity, placed on professionals. Professionals are expected to demonstrate theoretical, technical and moral excellence in their work with patients, their colleagues, and the community.

Because society places so much trust in professions, members of a profession are held accountable by other professionals in the field through professional organizations such as the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Nurses Association (ANA), American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT), American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), and others.

These professional associations set standards to ensure essential competencies in the field. Often these standards require ongoing education and training as a way making sure that members are up to date in all aspects of their work.

Society often turns the responsibility of disciplining members over to the appropriate professional association. This is an affirmation of the high regard in which professions are held. Public trust is lost when professionals are not held accountable by their peers.

SLIDE 3 **Professional Duties**

Professional duties are primarily based on the principles of beneficence and justice. The primary duty of healthcare is to benefit the patient. This means that health care professionals will sometimes take additional risks and responsibilities on behalf of their patients. The primary duty of healthcare workers is to their patients. NBC News reported that during Hurricane Katrina Thousands of health care workers stayed with patients in devastated hospitals and thousands more rushed in to help ([http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9270986/ns/health/t/doctors-medical-workers-are-katrina-](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9270986/ns/health/t/doctors-medical-workers-are-katrina-))
Personal or professional gain should not be factors in making care decisions.

Healthcare organizations are complex. They are organized on a hierarchy. They use vast amounts of public and private resources. They incorporate a variety of people with different training, skills, and goals into teams. They require communication and cooperation in tense situations. The complexity of medicine demands that health care professionals treat their colleagues with respect at all times, maintaining honesty and openness even under stress, not only in order to maintain professional working relationships but also as a matter of putting the patient first.

Justice is centered on the duty to make sure that every patient has the same access to the basic social goods and services. Certainly individual patients should be treated justly, but justice is more than individuals. Justice is properly focused on institutional, social and systemic issues that both directly and indirectly affect patients.

While the first duty of health care workers is to the patients, duties to the care team, the community and society cannot be forgotten. As the American Physical Therapy Association notes in Principle #8 of its code of professional ethics, “Physical therapists shall participate in efforts to meet the health needs of people locally, nationally, or globally.”

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) begins its code of ethics with a preamble that states: “Ethical obligations are central to the professional's responsibility… sensitive information (e.g., genetic, adoption, drug, alcohol, sexual, health, and behavioral information) requires special attention to prevent misuse.”

Ideally patients develop a relationship of trust with those who provide their health care. Patients put their health, sometimes even their lives, in the hands of others. Lack of patient trust can negatively affect the outcome of treatment. When a patient does not trust that embarrassing or sensitive information will be kept private, it is unlikely that the patient will fully disclose necessary information to their health care providers.

Concerns over confidentiality and privacy appear in nearly every aspect of medical ethics. Patients that do not trust that their health care information will be kept private sometimes demonstrate behaviors that negatively impact their treatment. Patients may choose to hop from clinic to clinic or doctor to doctor as a way of keeping information they want kept private out of hands they do not trust. Patients may leave out information crucial for a correct diagnosis because they are ashamed, embarrassed or afraid that others will find out information they wish kept private.

Sometimes patients have been known to lie about symptoms or about lifestyle choices because the level of trust needed has not been established. Occasionally patients will ask that certain information be left out of the record or even a lesser condition be recorded instead. Maybe the most common response is that people in need may avoid the healthcare system altogether. When patients fear their
records will not be kept confidential, any information collected will be unreliable. Excellent health care depends on complete confidentiality.

SLIDE 6 - **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**

Privacy is the right of an individual to control access to one’s personal information. This is primarily grounded in the principle of autonomy and is sometimes expressed as the right of sovereignty over one’s self. Becoming a patient can mean surrendering some privacy when it becomes necessary to share personal information or access to our bodies for the limited purposes of diagnosis and therapeutic treatment.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) establishes national standards to protect individuals’ medical records and other personal health information. The HIPAA law applies to insurance plans as well as health care providers. HIPAA requires that everyone who accesses private patient information must take positive steps to safeguard the privacy of personal health information. They must also place limits on the use of health information made without the patient’s permission. HIPAA gives patients’ rights over their health information, including rights to examine and obtain a copy of their health records, and to request corrections.

[https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/](https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/)

SLIDE 7 - **HIPAA Minimum Necessary Standard**

The HIPAA Minimum Necessary Standard is a type of “need to know” policy based on the principle that protected health information should not be used or disclosed when it is not necessary to satisfy a particular purpose or carry out a function. Businesses and institutions that deal with personal medical information are required to evaluate their practices and enhance their safeguards as needed to limit unnecessary or inappropriate access to protected health information. Medical professionals should only share private health information to those who have a legitimate need to know.


SLIDE 8 – **Limits on Employers**

Your health care provider or your health care plan cannot give your employer personal health information without the individual’s authorization, even if your employer asks your health care provider directly for information.

That being said, HIPAA does not apply to the actions of an employer. Be aware that an employer can ask for a doctor’s note or other health information if they need the information for sick leave, workers’ compensation, wellness programs, or health insurance.
Health care professionals need to establish trust if they are to receive the crucial personal information necessary to accurately diagnose and treat their patients. Privacy laws help in assuring patients that their confidential information will be actively guarded and safely maintained and that personal information will not be revealed to others without the patient’s permission.