

# Practising Professionalism as a Medical Student

This is a postgraduate course for a professional degree. Postgraduates are expected to act as adult learners. Professionals are expected to act and behave in a manner that reflects the codes of their profession. The standards are usually stem from showing respect for others, ie patients, colleagues and staff by dress, behaviour and communication.

Most of what is listed below relates to basic, cross-cultural manners, showing respect for others.

## Behaviour and Conduct

As an intern, you will be doing long shifts regularly, requiring you to juggle and prioritise multiple issues on an administrative and patient care level. Failing to attend ward rounds on time and not following up results in a timely manner will have a negative impact on patient outcomes and result in members of the treating team having to cover for you.

Studies show that students that have communication and administrative issues continue to have these problems as doctors, resulting in recurrent staff and patient complaints as well as difficulties with regulatory bodies. Therefore, starting good habits now (whilst identifying and quashing bad habits) will put you in good stead for internship and beyond. Turning up to sessions on time, submitting assignments before the due date, engaging and showing respect to colleagues, staff and patients, and personal care including dress are all small but significant ways in working towards self-confidence and competence as a professional.

### Student behaviour in clinical settings

- Always have your name badge clearly visible.
- Always introduce yourself by stating name and position (ie student).
- Refer to medical staff by their titles (eg Doctor, Mister, Professor). If in doubt, use “doctor”.
- If you are part of a medical or surgical team, you must be present at least 10 minutes before the start of a ward round.
- Avoid making faces or inappropriate comments on a patient’s state (eg a malodorous infected foot; stoma change).
- No running and no shouting.
- No mobile phones out (unless specifically for clinical teamwork).
- No handbags or backpacks.

### Student behaviour in teaching spaces

While many teaching staff are university employed, please be aware that teaching spaces are often a part of the hospital where WHS requirements apply. Any teaching space needs to be treated like a section of a clinic or ward. That means no running and no shouting. You will be asked to leave for inappropriate behaviour. Depending on the behaviour, you may be banned for a period of time and reported to the board of examiners.

## Student communications with staff or patients

Students should address academic or clinical staff by their titles (eg Doctor, Professor), unless otherwise advised. This extends to written communication via letter or email. Professional email etiquette applies. If you are unsure how to do this, there are many sites online that can assist you.

The principles of courtesy and manners extend to all administrative and other professional staff of the university and clinical settings.

Students should maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries with all people they encounter during clinical placements. Be appropriately cautious in arranging one-one meetings with staff or patients after hours or out of usual workplace/teaching spaces. Manage this courteously and professionally by suggesting alternative meeting time or place.

Where possible and practicable, students should avoid seeing their teaching staff (whether university, hospital or clinic) for their health needs.

## Intimate Examination of patients

It is appropriate for all intimate examinations to be done with chaperone or observer assistance – this should also be considered with all people, including those of the same gender as you. As a student it is more challenging to ensure that adequate trust has been established for the context of an intimate examination. It is advisable that you ask your supervisor to observe you perform the examination once the patient has given consent, so that you can receive feedback.

## Dress

Dress appropriately for the profession. Students should dress in a way that is respectful to patients, colleagues and staff. Clothing should also be safe and appropriate for the environment they are in (including WHS compliance).

## Clinic and ward attire

Dress appropriately for the profession. We suggest dressing conservatively. This is not about expressing yourself or how you would like your ideal doctor to dress. Dress for the average patient and staff member in this community. There are also some national and state WH&S requirements. On top of this, different clinical settings have variations in some of these areas, so if you have any doubts, ASK.

Some general guidelines for clinic attire include:

- ID – always wear your ID badge where it is easily visible.
- Hair – long hair tied back (WHS)
- Nails – short (WHS and infection control); no false nails (WHS and infection control);
- Clothes – No hats or caps. Avoid excessively low tops or short skirts.
- Shoes – always closed (WHS). Avoid high heels (WHS)

- Piercings – Ears only, studs only (WHS and infection control)
- Tattoos – cover up
- Wristwatches, necklaces, rings – can wear but generally avoided due to infection risk
- Mobile phones – Avoid as is infection risk. If you must, keep in pocket.
- Bags and handbags – LEAVE IN LOCKER.
- Food and drink – only in designated areas, ie tearoom. Otherwise check with individual wards.

### Attire in teaching spaces

Dress appropriately for staff as well as your colleagues. Avoid excessively low tops or pants. Avoid t-shirts and short skirts.

For sessions where students are practising on each other, it is appropriate to wear loose fitting clothing, with:

- Nails cut – especially when performing examinations on others and for standardised patients.
- Shoes – closed (WHS). Avoid high heels (Hospital WHS).
- Mobile phones – LEAVE IN LOCKER.
- Bags and handbags – LEAVE IN LOCKER.
- Food and drink – Water bottles ok. No food in teaching spaces.

### Further reading

Please refer to the 'Professionalism' sections of:

1. The Australian Curriculum Framework for Junior Doctors  
<http://curriculum.cpmec.org.au/professionalism.cfm>
2. Flinders University Doctor of Medicine Curriculum  
<https://sway.office.com/Ks8P7ZkDykWYfNwh?ref=Link>

For further information about intimate examinations and code of conduct, please refer to the Medical Board of Australia's policies and guidelines:

<https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Policies.aspx>