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Would you like to be published?**

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You are invited to share your original contributions on appropriate topics in your field of expertise (ECG, bookkeeping, phlebotomy, insurance and coding, etc.) or on information of interest to anyone in a professional business or medical environment such as stress reduction, communication, ethics in the workplace, conflict resolution, basic management skills, etc.

Step 1: Submit your resume (or CV) and a suggested topic to conted@ncctinc.com. Following a review of your credentials and experience, you will be contacted about submitting a course.

Step 2: Write and submit the course. The course will be reviewed for potential publication.

Step 3: You will be notified if your course is selected for publication. The course may be edited for clarity, style, and conciseness. The final version of the course will be emailed to the author prior to publication.

NCCT will provide an honorarium of \$100 per clock hour of credit granted for the article. We determine the amount of credit using the P.A.C.E.® formula for clock hour calculation for printed materials. This calculation is done by having an NCCT test group read the manuscript under timed conditions and using that number to calculate the clock hours according to the following formula:

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If you have questions or are interested in contributing, please contact us at the mail or email addresses provided below. If you know a colleague who might be interested in submitting a course, please feel free to pass this information on. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please write your article to include the following information in order in a Microsoft Word file. You may submit your article by email or on disc. Any photos used must be non-copyrighted and digital images in .JPEG or .GIF format with a resolution of at least 300 dpi are preferred.

1. Continuing Education Topic Title
2. Author Name, Title, Credentials: If you are interested in free advertising, you may include any information you would like to share about your upcoming books, articles, courses, etc.
3. Course Introduction: One paragraph to let individuals decide whether it is pertinent for them to select your module as part of their annual CE as they will have several topics and contributions from which to choose.
4. Course Objectives: Submit objectives as demonstrated in the examples below.

Upon completion of this CE module, the professional will be able to:

1. Identify the effects of antibiotic resistance on healthcare in general.
2. Describe four methods by which antibiotics kill or prevent bacteria from multiplying.
3. List examples of overuse and misuse of antibiotics.

Etc.

5. Course Content (the actual article): Illustrations, photographs, and charts are encouraged to complement the article.
6. References, Citations, Bibliography
7. Exam Questions: Submit at least 10-20 multiple choice questions with four responses.
8. Answer Key

A copy of one of our CE courses is attached so you can see our preferred formatting.

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Aspects of Professionalism 1

Integrity, Competency, Ethical Behavior

P.A.C.E.® APPROVED

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Professionalism – employers want it, employees need it. But what is it? Surveys of employers and employees have identified many characteristics that are defined as those exhibited by a professional. This continuing education course is the first in a series of three courses describing various aspects of professional behavior. This course will discuss integrity, competency, and ethical behavior.

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COURSE TITLE: Aspects of Professionalism 1

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Number of Clock Hours Credit: 1.0

Course # 1220108

P.A.C.E. ® Approved: Yes No

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this continuing education course, the professional should be able to:

1. Provide at least two definitions of professionalism.
2. Provide at least two examples of a professional.
3. Recognize 7 aspects of professionalism mentioned in the article.
4. Explain the difference between morals and ethics.
5. Provide at least two examples of moral and ethical violations.
6. Recognize the presence of integrity when given examples of behaviors.
7. Name 3 components of competency.
8. Name 2 important characteristics of a competency statement.
9. Explain what an entry-level competency is.
10. Explain how a competent employee might have a poor level of performance.
11. Explain how employees demonstrate competency to their employers.
12. State the Greek roots from which the words "morals" and "ethics" are derived.
13. Provide examples of how an employee might demonstrate ethical behavior.

Disclaimer

The writers for NCCT continuing education courses attempt to provide factual information based on literature review and current professional practice. However, NCCT does not guarantee that the information contained in the continuing education courses is free from all errors and omissions.

INTRODUCTION

Professionalism – employers want it, employees need it. But--what is it?

A search of online dictionaries produced the following definitions for the word *professionalism*.

- Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)
 - professional character, spirit, or methods
 - the standing, practice, or methods of a professional, as distinguished from an amateur
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary
 - the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person
 - the following of a profession (as athletics) for gain or livelihood
- The American Heritage Online Dictionary
 - professional status, methods, character, or standards
 - the use of professional performers, as in athletics or in the arts
- Cambridge Online Dictionaries
 - the combination of all the qualities that are connected with trained and skilled people

One definition that is easy to understand is the status difference between being an amateur and being a professional. For example, when teenagers play football, they are amateurs. When adults watch Monday night football, they are watching professionals play football. Professionals are generally paid for their skills.

The other definitions are not so clear—they deal with professionalism as the exhibition of professional character, qualities, etc. A professional demonstrates professional characteristics. Exhibiting professional characteristics makes appear professional. It seems somewhat analogous to “Which came first—the chicken or the egg?”.

When asked, most employers and employees list the following among the characteristics of a professional.

- Integrity
- Competency
- Ethical behavior
- Resilient
- Reliable
- Respectful
- Team player
- Time management
- Communication skills

This continuing education course will focus on the professional characteristics of integrity, competency, and ethical behavior. This is the first in a series of three continuing education courses focusing on aspects of professionalism.

INTEGRITY

In December of 2005, *USA Today* reported that the word *integrity* was the #1 most commonly searched word online for the year. About 200,000 people went to the Merriam-Webster dictionary website to find out the word's meaning. Why this word, at this time? The year 2005 was a year when many corporate accounting scandals and related issues were in the media. Most of the scandals involved fraudulent accounting practices that boosted the profits and hid the debts of the companies. These practices increased the salaries and bonuses of the corporate owners and executives. Some owners and executives even shredded documents to hide the fraudulent practices and now these individuals are serving time in federal prisons. These corporations include Enron, Halliburton, Home Depot, Tyco, and many more. Even Martha Stewart was convicted of insider trading and served time in jail. Individuals involved with fraudulent practices were corrupt; they did not act with integrity. All of the media discussion regarding these corporations and individuals mentioned the lack of personal integrity, which probably sent people to dictionaries to become reacquainted with this word.

A search of online dictionaries produced the following definitions for the word *integrity*.

- Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)
 - Adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty
- The American Heritage Online Dictionary
 - Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary
 - Firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values; incorruptibility
- Cambridge Online Dictionaries
 - The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change

Integrity is often described as doing the right thing when no one is watching. Integrity is about doing what is right rather than what is perhaps easy. Integrity is intertwined with honesty, reliability, and responsibility. Other individuals have said that integrity is the bridge between character and conduct. Socrates (469 ~ 399 BC) taught "The greatest way to live with honor in this world is to be what we pretend to be."

An often-cited example of integrity is about General Robert E. Lee (1807-1870). After the U.S. Civil War, General Lee was offered \$10,000 a year to become president, in name only, of an insurance company. He declined the offer with these words, "Excuse me, sir; I cannot consent to receive pay for services I do not render."

Brigadier General (retired) Malham M. Wakin, a Permanent Professor Emeritus of the U.S. Air Force Academy, relates a story about integrity that occurred when he was teaching a college medical ethics class. A student in the class asked Gen. Wakin to change his grade on a paper from a “B” to an “A”. The student requested the change, as he needed an “A” on the paper to get an A in the course. If he did not receive an “A” in the course, it would jeopardize his chances of getting into medical school. Gen. Wakin was aware of the hard work this student had put into the course and in to the paper. He thought the student would be an excellent physician and had even written positive letters of recommendation to several medical schools for the student. However, almost immediately, Gen. Wakin responded, “I can’t do that.” to the student. He explained that raising the grade would compromise his integrity for the following reasons:

- The work was not really “A” work.
- It would be inappropriate to base student grades on “need to get into medical school” as opposed to the “quality of work”.
- It would be unfair to other students whose work was graded based on qualitative merit.

Gen. Wakin explained he certainly could change the grade. He had the authority to do so, he was the only instructor for the course, and he did not fear losing his job if it was discovered. He simply knew that changing the grade was not the right thing to do. As a teacher, he felt the responsibility to be a role model for students in his courses and the teaching professionals with which he worked. Gen. Wakin believed that integrity is the modern name used to describe the actions of persons who consistently act from a firmly established character pattern, doing the right thing.

An employee demonstrates integrity by

- Being consistently honest, e.g. including not lying or embellishing on a resume, admitting a mistake, etc.,
- Being trustworthy with another’s property, including that of coworkers,
- Maintaining confidentiality of client information such as medical and/or financial information,
- Always performing high quality work regardless of whether it will receive notice from others,
- Declining to participate in destructive gossip or spreading rumors,
- Following through on commitments, and
- Giving credit where credit is due and not taking credit for another employee’s idea or work.

“The time is always right to do what is right.” ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.
American civil rights activist, 1929-1968

COMPETENCY

The definition of competency as it relates to work performance is defined by Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1) is

Having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience, etc, for some purpose; properly qualified: *He is perfectly competent to manage the bank branch.*

Competency is the combination of knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to work effectively on the job. Competencies are observable and measurable. Synonyms of competent are capable and proficient.

How does one become competent? One goal of education and training programs is to provide an individual with sufficient knowledge and skills to enter a specified area of employment. These are called entry-level competencies and the employer generally will assume the new graduate from a school will have these competencies. However, to assure a new employee has these skills, the employer should assess a new employee's ability to perform these competencies. Assessment generally occurs during a new employee orientation period. Competency is assessed in various ways, the most common being observation by a supervisor who completes documentation such as a checklist. Examples of entry-level competencies follow.

- The surgical technician correctly cleans debris from used surgical instruments prior to disinfection.
- The phlebotomist collects blood specimens by venipuncture using the correct order of draw.
- The insurance and coding specialist correctly codes outpatient surgery procedures.
- The bookkeeper performs account reconciliation when indicated.
- The medical assistant practices appropriate hand hygiene measures.

Entry-level competencies that are psychomotor skills are easier to evaluate than the knowledge that lies behind the skills. This is one of the purposes of certification. Many employers require certification as a measure of knowledge about core areas of the professional practice. When an employee has professional credentials, this is a statement that he/she has adequate knowledge to enter the profession.

Competency evolves as an employee uses his/her professional skills. Higher levels of learning and understanding occur as an employee gains proficiency, learns how to problem solve and troubleshoot issues, and learns new skills. Maintenance of competence is a life-long process.

Closely related to assessment of competency is performance appraisal. Often these two evaluations are thought to be the same. However, an employee can be competent but demonstrate poor levels of performance. For example, a phlebotomist can describe all of the steps in patient identification but fail to use the steps prior to performing a venipuncture. An employee doing this also demonstrates lack of integrity.

Competent employees know their strengths, and more importantly, know their limitations. True professionals recognize their need for guidance and supervision when faced with performing a new skill.

Employees demonstrate competency by

- Knowing what their employer expects,
- Following policies and procedures,
- Never using shortcuts,
- Maintaining the highest possible technical standards,
- Knowing when to ask for help or saying, "I don't know or I am not sure."
- Performing to the best of their ability all of the time,
- Referring work to other employees when their own skills are not sufficient,
- Taking a national certification examination even if not required for the job,
- Never performing skills that have not been taught and assessed,
- Being accountable and learning from errors, and
- Continuously seeking out educational opportunities to upgrade skills.

"No letters after your name are ever going to be a total guarantee of competence any more than they are a guarantee against fraud. Improving competence involves continuing professional development... That is the really crucial thing, not just passing an examination." ~ Colette Bowe, British Business Executive

ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

What are ethics? How does one act ethically? How does an individual know if he/she is ethical? What is the difference between ethics and morals?

Ethics is the philosophic study of morals. Philosophical discussions on ethics and morals have been going on since the time of Socrates (469 ~ 399 BC) and Plato (428 ~ 348 BC). Many think these two words are synonymous but, in fact, they are not. The root word for *ethic* is the Greek "ethos," meaning character. The root word for *moral* is Latin "mos," meaning custom. Dictionary definitions of the words are:

- Ethics: a system of morally correct conduct; character
- Morals: a principle of right and wrong conduct; custom

In today's world, most philosophers describe morals as the principles one lives by, and ethics as the system by which one puts those principles into action. Ethics have to do with the individual's character; morals have to do with society's customs. Ethical behavior, much like integrity, is recognized as the mark of a good and decent person. While integrity is not a synonym for ethics, it is difficult to practice one without the other.

“Ethics is a code of values which guide our choices and actions and determines the purpose and course of our lives.” ~ Ayn Rand, U.S. (Russian-born) novelist, 1905-1982

Most professional organizations such as medicine, law, and many others have developed a code of ethics. These codes essentially state that the members will not do anything to compromise the integrity of the profession. As examples, doctors will “first, do no harm”, accounting professionals will follow sound accounting practices, lawyers will maintain client-attorney privilege, and coding specialists will maintain patient confidentiality.

Due to the previously mentioned financial scandals, most businesses have developed ethics guidelines in addition to their company policies, procedures, and regulations. Businesses that operate ethically receive many benefits including improved client trust and respect; positive work environment; improved customer service; and long-term success. Employees also benefit as the company maintains a good reputation, which makes it a more pleasant and less stressful workplace.

Acting ethically is not just the responsibility of the business owners, chief financial officers, or those in charge. Each employee has the responsibility of acting in an ethical manner. Consider the following examples and determine which individual best exhibits ethical behavior.

Example A: A friend of a medical assistant has asked her for some samples of a commonly prescribed erectile dysfunction drug. The medical assistant gladly agrees and brings her friend several samples.

Example B: One of the responsibilities of the bookkeeper for a small business is to maintain a petty cash fund. The bookkeeper decides she wants to take some friends out to dinner so she “borrows” some money from petty cash with plans to replace it the next day.

Example C: A friend of a phlebotomist suspects she is pregnant and she asks the phlebotomist if she can bring her a pregnancy test from the laboratory. The phlebotomist replies, “No, I am uncomfortable doing this as it seems like I am stealing from the laboratory. Also, laboratory tests should only be done when a doctor has ordered them.”

Example D: A high school student needs to turn in a term paper on ethics and, instead of writing one himself; he goes to a website to purchase a paper.

With these examples, it is clear that the phlebotomist in Example C is exhibiting ethical behavior. He/she realized that running the laboratory pregnancy test for personal use is wrong for two reasons: it is stealing from the laboratory and it is illegal to perform laboratory tests without a doctor's order.

The medical assistant in Example A should not be dispensing any drug samples without the doctor's orders. What if the medical assistant's friend had an adverse reaction to the drug and had to go to the Emergency Room? The medical assistant might be held legally liable at worst, and obviously did not act in the patient's best interest, which is a violation of the medical assistant ethical code.

The bookkeeper in Example B has essentially stolen money from her place of employment. Every culture views stealing as morally wrong so the bookkeeper is exhibiting unethical behavior. In addition, what if her employer discovers money is missing and there is no documentation of how it was spent? The bookkeeper could be fired and his/her chance of obtaining a letter of recommendation is zero.

Example D illustrates two unethical behaviors. The student is cheating by purchasing a term paper. In addition, the online company that sells term papers is helping the student to cheat. It appears to be twice as unethical when the online company is selling term papers on ethics.

Almost all employees comply with the "big" policies and procedures such as patient confidentiality, patient privacy, financial regulations, and more. Most ethics violations occur in the day-to-day actions of employees (and employers). While seemingly insignificant, these behaviors can erode the foundation of the business, as well as the character of the individuals themselves.

George S. May of the George S. May International Company offers a self- assessment checklist to identify some frequently seen unethical behaviors. Some of the items included on the checklist are:

- "Little white lies" you tell
- Racist and/or sexual jokes you tell
- Way you treat and talk about fellow employees
- Non-business related e-mails you write and forward to others
- "Padding" expense reports, time sheets, billing sheets, etc
- Office supplies you take home
- Commitments you don't keep
- Personal business you conduct at work
- Work rules that you break
- Things you reproduce on the copy machine
- How you handle customer concerns/complains (including the number of individuals the customer is forwarded to)
- Credit you don't share with others
- Not working to the "best of your abilities"

Are you guilty of any of the checklist items? These behaviors and many others reflect who an individual is and what he/she stands for. An individual never knows who is watching his/her behavior and what message he or she is sending.

It is apparent that some unethical behaviors are more serious than others. For example, using the copy machine to photocopy recipes is not as serious as failing to follow patient privacy regulations. Employers may tolerate some unethical behaviors. However, most employers have zero tolerance for breaking governmental laws or regulations; for jeopardizing public and employee safety; for dishonestly altering reports and records.

An employee demonstrates ethical behavior by:

- Adhering to all laws and regulations relating to the profession,
- Adhering to all of the businesses' policies and procedures,
- Not compromising patient (or client) confidentiality,
- Performing work to the best of his/her abilities,
- Telling the truth,
- Not cheating on mandatory education tests (if applicable),
- Not disappearing when there is work to be done,
- Avoiding excessively long breaks,
- Not manipulating schedules for personal benefit,
- Never discriminating on any basis,
- Not abusing the business phone, email, and mail services,
- Reporting violations of laws, regulations, policies, and procedures to the appropriate individual(s),
- Asking for guidance if an answer is not known,
- Never coming to work under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, and
- Never sacrificing quality for financial gain.

“Notice that ‘I’ is at the center of the word ‘ethical’. There is no ‘they’.” Achieving the ethics of excellence is our own individual assignment.” ~ Price Pritchett, Ph.D., Chairman, and CEO of Pritchett, LP, a Dallas-based consulting and training firm

CONCLUSION

There are many facets of professional behavior. This CE course has discussed only three: integrity, competency, and ethical behavior. Before taking the CE test, the reader should take a few minutes to think of examples where he/she has personified these characteristics and where improvements can be made.

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TEST QUESTIONS
Aspects of Professionalism 1
Course 1220108

Directions:

- Before taking this test, read the instructions on how to correctly complete the answer sheet.
- Select the response that best completes each sentence or answers each question from *the information presented in the module*.
- If you are having great difficulty answering a question, go to www.ncctinc.com and select Renewal/CE, then select Updates/Revisions to see if course content and/or a test question have been revised.

1. Which one of the following is NOT mentioned as one of the aspects of professionalism?
 - a. Communication skills
 - b. Ethical behavior
 - c. Level of education
 - d. Time management

2. In 2005, the definition of which one of the following words was the most searched for in online dictionaries?
 - a. Competency
 - b. Ethics
 - c. Integrity
 - d. Resiliency

3. Which one of the following corporations was involved in fraudulent accounting practices?
 - a. AT & T
 - b. Enron
 - c. Lowe's
 - d. Toys R Us

4. The definitions listed for the word *integrity* most often refer to this trait as an adherence to strong _____ values.
 - a. altruistic
 - b. family
 - c. financial
 - d. moral

5. Integrity is often defined as _____.
- a. assuring all financial practices are above board
 - b. doing the right thing when no one is watching
 - c. doing the right thing only when someone is watching
 - d. pretending to be someone you are not
6. Brigadier General Malham Wakin did not change the student's grade on a class paper because _____.
- a. he didn't have time to do so
 - b. he didn't want the student to get into med school
 - c. he thought it would compromise his integrity
 - d. he thought the other students would be upset
7. Which employee behavior below would be a demonstration of integrity?
- a. Declining to spread rumors about a coworker
 - b. Overstating abilities on a resume
 - c. Taking credit for someone else's idea
 - d. Taking money from a coworker's drawer for a can of soda
8. Who is quoted as saying "The time is always right to do what is right."
- a. Brigadier General Malham Wakin
 - b. General Robert E. Lee
 - c. Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - d. Socrates
9. Which of the following are components of competency?
- a. Behaviors
 - b. Knowledge
 - c. Skills
 - d. All answers are correct
10. Competencies must be _____.
- a. measurable
 - b. observable
 - c. a only
 - d. both a and b

11. Which of the following is a TRUE statement about entry-level competencies?
- a. Education and training programs strive to provide students with knowledge and skills to enter the workforce.
 - b. Employers should just assume a new employee has entry-level competencies.
 - c. Entry-level competencies are always measured by written exams.
 - d. Entry-level competencies are all an employee will ever need to be successful on the job.
12. One of the purposes of a certification exam is to _____.
- a. assure employers they have a good employee
 - b. determine the employee's level of professional knowledge
 - c. eliminate the need to measure entry-level competencies
 - d. measure an employee's skills
13. Employee competency development is an evolving and life-long process.
- a. True
 - b. False
14. An employee who has demonstrated a competency but fails to perform the competency appropriately is demonstrating lack of _____.
- a. honesty
 - b. integrity
 - c. knowledge
 - d. skill
15. Which of the following is a FALSE statement about employee competency?
- a. A competent employee looks up a procedure when he/she cannot remember exactly how to complete the procedure.
 - b. A competent employee performs to the best of his/her ability.
 - c. A competent employee looks for opportunities to improve his/her skills.
 - d. A competent employee performs skills with which he/she is unfamiliar.
16. Ethics is the philosophic study of _____.
- a. competency
 - b. honesty
 - c. integrity
 - d. morals

17. The Latin root word for *moral* is _____.
- a. character
 - b. custom
 - c. ethic
 - d. society
18. Ethics are associated with an individual's _____.
- a. character
 - b. customs
 - c. both a and b
 - d. neither a or b
19. Who is quoted as saying “Ethics is a code of values which guide our choices and actions and determines the purpose and course of our lives” ?
- a. Colette Bowe
 - b. Plato
 - c. Ayn Rand
 - d. Socrates
20. Acting ethically in the workplace is the responsibility of _____.
- a. everyone associated with the company
 - b. the business owners
 - c. the chief executive officer
 - d. the vice president
21. Which one of the following is NOT considered an **unethical** behavior?
- a. An employee is late to work due to a traffic accident on the highway. On the timesheet, the employee writes down the time she should have arrived at work and not the time she actually arrived.
 - b. An employee gives out his toll-free work phone number to family members who live out of state so they can call him at work at no charge.
 - c. An employee's son needs a set of colored markers to complete a school project. Although the mother has access to these types of markers in the office supply cabinet, she stops at Wal-Mart on the way home from work to purchase a set.
 - d. An employee wants a day off from work to run some errands. He has sick time available but no more available vacation time. He calls in sick to get the day off.

End of Test