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What Does Professionalism Mean to You? Part II

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What Does Professionalism Mean to You? Part II

More thoughts on professionalism
from young dentists across the state.



Read what these MDA members have to say about the meaning of professionalism. We think you'll agree . . . these new dentists take their role as professionals seriously, and that's good news for Michigan dentistry.

By Michael G. Maihofer, DDS

In this issue of the *Journal*, we conclude our two-part series showcasing the responses of many young MDA members to our query concerning “professionalism” and what that term means to them. We would like to thank all those who participated for making this such a worthwhile project.

Of course, getting here wasn't without its frustrations. We reached out to 54 young MDA members from throughout the state using a list that supported practice, geographical, gender, ethnic, and racial diversity. Phone messages describing the project were initially left with practice receptionists, who were asked to have the dentist call back for a further explanation and decision as to whether to participate. If we received no response after one week, we called and left a second message the following week. It was made perfectly clear that a representative from their professional association — the Michigan Dental Association — was calling about whether they might want to participate in an MDA *Journal* series on young MDA member dentists. It was emphasized that this was not a solicitation; we weren't selling anything, we

were simply asking for a call back to explain the series and how they might participate if they chose. In some cases, if still no response was received, an email was sent to their personal email explaining the project and encouraging their participation.

Many members called back after the first message. Some after the second. Only a few who agreed over the phone failed to participate. But here's the disappointing part: Although 33 members called or emailed their response, 21 others never even bothered to reply. They couldn't take the time, nor make the effort, to respond to a professional colleague. So, perhaps we might ask; what does *that* say about professionalism?

But don't get me wrong. Overall, I'm very optimistic about the state of professionalism in Michigan dentistry. I hope you agree with me that the responses and enthusiasm we did receive portend well for dentistry's future in Michigan. I thank all who participated, and I encourage everyone to think about what being a dental professional means and how that is reflected in their practice of dentistry.

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“What Professionalism Means to Me . . .” Here’s How These Dentists Define It



AMANDA MILLER, DDS — Battle Creek

“To me, the most important aspect of professionalism as a dentist is sitting down with a patient and listening to them — truly listening, to what they desire for themselves and their own health. Then, taking those desires/goals and co-creating a plan with them to help achieve their

goals. I feel that one of the most professional things we can do as dentists is to set aside all of our biases, preconceived notions, and expertise and create an opportunity to connect with people on a personal level before we focus on their teeth. There is a whole person attached to those teeth who is waiting to be listened to. This is something that I’ve found to be invaluable and also very rewarding in my own journey to bettering myself as a dentist for my patients.”

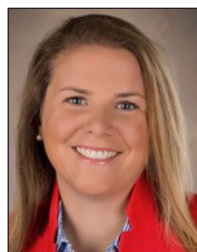


DOUG CABELL, DDS — Hartland

“Professionalism is about having a set of principles and consistently following them. The days as a dentist can be hectic, and we often feel pulled in multiple directions. What sets professionals apart is their ability to maintain standards, despite potential distractions. In our

practice, this means focusing on treating people how we

would want to be treated. We strive to be transparent about necessary treatments and those that may not be required. We take the extra time to ensure patients’ comfort and provide painless injections. These actions build trust in both our practice and the dental profession as a whole.”



JENN CLEARY, DDS — East Lansing

“Professionalism isn’t something that can be taught, and isn’t a label that is self-given. Rather, I think it’s something that is ingrained in all of us and observed by those around us. As dentists, whether it’s a good day or an ‘off’ day for us personally, we need to do right by our

patients, team members, and colleagues. That means always being the same person and always following our morals and principles regardless of the situation.”



BRANDON JANKOWSKI, DDS — Grand Rapids

“Professionalism in dentistry is much more than just having great clinical technique and patient care. It’s committing to be someone who is held to a high standard in the community and someone who can be counted on. To be a professional

you need to have great ethical and moral values that people can strive to emulate. This has been something that has been taught and emphasized to me by my family, throughout my education by my professors, and by my mentors after school.”

What Do You Think?

Now that you’ve read how a cross-section of newer dentists defines “professionalism” — what do you think? What are your thoughts on dentistry as a true profession, and dentists as true professionals? Is it important to you? Has dentistry lost a step — or are we maintaining the goals and professional ideals of years past?

As always, your thoughts are welcome. Consider writing a brief “Letter to the Editor” to share your views. You can email it to Dave Foe, Journal Managing Editor, at dfoe@michigandental.org.



ANDREANA DIMITRY, DDS — Clinton Twp.

“Professionalism is the foundation of building trusting and long-lasting relationships. One way in which I demonstrate professionalism is how I address the needs, concerns, and priorities of my patients. In dental school, I learned the value of ‘empathetic listening’ through

simulated patient case-based scenarios. I utilize the skills I

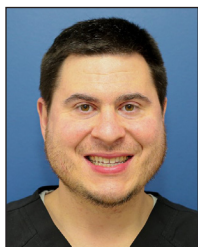
learned in my everyday practice by consistently approaching all aspects of care with compassion, sincerity, and understanding. Oftentimes, we are inclined to jump right into diagnosing a problem and proposing solutions, without honoring the patient's desire to be heard. Expressing interest in the patient's underlying needs provides an opportunity for patients to express their feelings to completion. This allows for more expansive conversation, often providing pertinent information that will factor into treatment planning. I look to further enhance the confidence patients place in me by keeping personal information protected, making patients fully informed of their treatment options and financial concerns, as well as the risks and benefits associated with treatment. Overall, professionalism is demonstrated by displaying accountability, responsibility, and respect."



LOGAN WHITE, DDS — Rochester

"I see professionalism as a responsibility that is earned when we graduate from dental school. As professionals, we acknowledge that we have been tasked with the opportunity to share what we have learned through our training to contribute to the wellness of our community. This means that we have agreed to responsibly treat our patients to an established standard of care. This responsibility goes beyond reciting statistics and following algorithms. We have the opportunity to customize our treatment to every person who enters into our office.

As professionals, we also have a responsibility to our team to conduct business, train, educate, and create an environment that ensures our team feels safe, valued, and motivated. Our sense of professionalism can be seen in every aspect of our practice. I feel it is important to be cognizant of the decisions that we make and how they impact how we view ourselves as professionals and health care providers."



KYLE KATYNSKI, DDS — Troy

"Professionalism to me is putting the best possible image of yourself out there with a realization that the world is always watching. This couldn't be more important to my new start-up practice that just opened, as I knew I had to demonstrate to my community that our office provided proficient patient-centered care. The more positive experiences patients had in our office and shared their experiences on social media and Google, the more others were willing to contact us and schedule an appointment. I feel professionalism is very critical to dentistry

going forward and was touched upon during dental school, as I recall reading the book *Professionalism Is for Everyone*. The best way I believe to demonstrate professionalism is to provide the highest quality care and communication for every patient who walks into your office or calls on the phone. It's also great to see so many dentists utilizing social media like Facebook and Instagram and demonstrating exactly how they complete various procedures that help to raise the public's perception of the standard of care."



NATASHA AAZAMI, DDS — Roseville

"I believe being professional is a special responsibility that ties in morality and enhances dignity. It is one of the first things I learned in my dental education, and it really set the stage for the rest of my career. It has taught me that by being a professional, we are accountable for giving

our patients the level of care that should be no less than what we would expect for ourselves — the Golden Rule. Professionalism requires a level head and demeanor. It positively distinguishes an individual. It asks for a willingness to consult with others on a daily basis, whether that be your staff, colleagues, or patients, to come up with solutions together. It is important to me in my daily practice and life, so I strive to display it to the best of my ability. I am always on a journey to learn how to improve it as life gives me more experience."

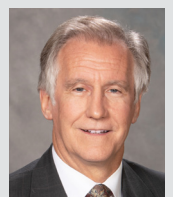


JAKE MILLER, DDS — Grand Rapids

"In a word, professionalism is about trust. Our patients trust that we have their best interests in mind when we are formulating a treatment plan. They trust our teams will develop skills in a way to treat them competently. They trust us to provide a comfortable, calming environment to receive care and to bill them fairly. Being a professional requires us to respect that social contract and not abuse it." ●

About the Author

Michael Maihofer, DDS, a retired general dentist from Roseville, chairs the MDA Committee on Peer Review/Ethics. He served as MDA president during the 2021-22 administrative year, and as MDA editor from 2000 until 2005. Contact him at mgmdds@wideopenwest.com.



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