Chapter One

The Meaning of Professionalism

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This chapter will provide general background information on the meaning and definition of professional behaviors as related to a number of professions. As mentioned in the introduction, a large part of the broader organization of the book is based on the behavioral categories found in the Professional Development Assessment (see Chapter 14 and Appendix). The assessment includes many of the behaviors considered under the general topic of professionalism. These behaviors and related aspects are integrated through each section of the book and serve to provide an underlying, consistent point of reference and framework. The behavioral categories, in the order they appear on the assessment, include: dependability, professional presentation, initiative, empathy, cooperation, organization, clinical reasoning, supervisory process, verbal communication, and written communication (Kasar, Clark, Watson, & Pfister, 1996). The assessment and behavioral categories are not intended as an all-inclusive list of aspects of professionalism, but rather they represent areas of importance and concern most often cited by students, practitioners, and educators.

Before discussing the definition and meaning of professionalism, a review of the current trends that accentuate the importance of professional behaviors is in order. With the shift from old to new paradigms within the current practice environment, there is an increasing need for high caliber technical skills and professional behaviors. Previously the practice orientation was focused on models that were institutionally based and illness-oriented. The practitioner was guided toward independence and maintenance of quality assurance.

Consumer awareness, rapid advances in technology and far-reaching changes in the monetary reimbursement system have created the need for change. Currently, the practice of health-related professions is more consumer and community focused, with an emphasis on wellness and prevention. The practitioner is now encouraged to be more interdependent and concerned with quality enhancement, rather than just the status quo. These changes are intended to promote practitioner accountability, while providing the most efficient, cost effective approach to consumer focused treatment. Table 1-1 summarizes some of the changes in the practice environment.

The changes in the practice environment have influenced professional preparation in a number of ways. In the past, teaching methods created a passive learning environment. The emphasis in both academic and clinical settings was on content issues and rote memorization. Today, there is a need to develop active, responsible, life-long learners, whether they are students or clinicians. While content issues are still significant, the exponential growth in new knowledge changes the focus to greater concentration on thinking and interacting. Therefore, great importance and concern has to be placed on clinical reasoning and professional behaviors for all practitioners. Table 1-2 summarizes some of the changes in professional preparation.

With the changes in the practice environment and