

Effective Date: January 1, 2019

Retired:

Revised:

Approved by:

Maria F. Lima, Ph.D. Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Research

Subject: Student Professional Behavior Policy in the PA Sciences Program

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is:

To outline the professional behavior expectations within the Meharry Medical College Physician Assistant Sciences Program (MMC PA).

POLICY STATEMENT:

Physician Assistant students are expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. Professionalism is a core Educational Program Objective of the Physician Assistant Program. The MMC PA Program has established the following policy and procedure for addressing standards of ethical and professional behavior in the PA Program.

A. Objectives

1. To document the priority placed by the MMC PA Program on the academic standards related to student ethical and professional behavior.
2. To provide students, faculty, and staff with clear articulation of the expectations regarding student ethical and professional behavior.
3. To identify procedures for managing and addressing student ethical and professional behavior issues.
4. To ensure standards of fairness, privacy, and certain processes are applied, as applicable.

B. Scope

All MMC PA students are expected to demonstrate high standards of ethical and professional behavior in all educational and clinical settings, including but not limited to:

1. classroom-based milieu (e.g., classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, on-line and technology-based classes);
2. professional and clinical sites that are part of the learning program (e.g., hospitals, clinics,

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community health centers, ambulatory settings);

3. other settings not part of the formal learning program but which contribute to the learning process (e.g., student-run special interest group meetings and activities, clubs and governance structures, interactions with College administrators and other members of the campus community); and,
4. Other settings as described below:

This Policy is intended to guide the ethical and professional behavior of MMC PA students in the PA educational program. It is not intended to directly guide or address behavior that is a part of a student's private life, but such behavior may come to the attention of the MMC PA Program in several ways and become the focus of a Policy investigation or charge:

- a) Conduct may be reported to a member of the faculty or administration by a variety of sources (e.g., police, friends, parents, other agencies) that raises a concern about the student's capacity to continue his or her studies. If such reported conduct raises a concern about the safety of the student or the safety of others that the student may have contact with at the institution or includes behavior that could indicate an issue with moral, ethical, or personal values that would preclude satisfactory functioning in the discipline, an investigation may be conducted and action taken on the basis of the investigation.
- b) If a student is charged with an offense in the criminal justice system and the College and/or MMC PA Program becomes aware of and verifies this circumstance through self-report of the student or a reliable, verified source, the College and/or MMC PA Program may elect to not pursue an investigation until the outcome of the criminal court proceeding is known, unless the alleged offense is such that allowing the student to continue his or her studies could be detrimental to the safety of patients or others, as determined by the MMC PA Program Director.
- c) If a student is charged with a criminal offense after the first day of classes, he or she is obligated to report this to the MMC PA Program Director immediately. If the MMC PA Program later discovers that a student withheld disclosure of a criminal charge, he/she may be subject to immediate dismissal by the MMC PA Student Progress Committee (SPC). Depending upon the nature of the criminal charge, the student may not be allowed to continue the course of study until there is final disposition of the criminal charge either by verdict, plea, or dismissal. This is consistent with the obligation of the MMC PA Program to ensure the safety of patients and others.

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MMC PA students are expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. As part of their education and training, MMC PA students must begin to practice professional behaviors that they will uphold for the rest of their professional lives. Fundamental attributes of professionalism and ethical and professional behavior include, but are not limited to, honesty and integrity, dedicated desire to learn and respect for the academic process, concern for the welfare of patients and their families, a commitment to patient confidentiality, respect for the rights of others, emotional maturity, and self-discipline.

While not all inclusive, examples of unacceptable ethical and professional behavior include but are not limited to the following:

1. Lack of integrity and honesty (e.g., lying about, misrepresenting, or not reporting information about care given, clinic errors, or any action related to clinic functions; acting outside the scope of his/her role in a clinical, academic, professional or administrative setting). NOTE: Allegations of academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, fraud, destruction, bribery or intimidation, assisting others in any act proscribed by the MMC PA Sciences Program Academic Dishonesty Policy, or attempting to engage in such acts, as defined under the MMC PA Sciences Program Academic Dishonesty Policy are addressed in the MMC PA Sciences Program Academic Dishonesty Policy.
2. Failure to demonstrate professional demeanor or concern for patient safety (e.g., use of offensive language and gestures, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the educational or clinic setting)
3. Unmet professional responsibility (e.g., not contributing to an atmosphere conducive to learning due to poor attendance, punctuality issues, and/or distracting, or insensitive behavior in class, lab, or clinic; poor personal hygiene; needing continual reminders to complete responsibilities in a timely manner; not responding to requests [written, verbal, e-mail, telephone] in a timely manner; breaching patient confidentiality)
4. Exhibiting disruptive behavior (e.g., pushing, punching, throwing things, making inappropriate gestures, threats, verbal intimidation, language that belittles or demeans, negative comments with racial, ethnic, religious, age, gender or sexual overtones, making impertinent or inappropriate written entries in the medical record or making statements attacking students, faculty or staff)
5. Lack of effort toward self-improvement and adaptability (e.g., resistant or defensive in accepting constructive criticism; remaining unaware of own inadequacies; resisting

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considering or making suggested changes to improve learning, behavior, or performance; not accepting responsibility for errors or failure; abusive or inappropriately critical, arrogant)

6. Lack of respect for cultural diversity (e.g., inappropriate interpersonal interaction with respect to age, culture, race, religion, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation)
7. Exhibiting diminished relationships with members of the health care team (e.g., not functioning appropriately within the health care team or not demonstrating the ability to collaborate with fellow students, staff)
8. Exhibiting diminished relationships with patients and families (e.g., insensitive to the patient's or family's needs, inappropriate personal relationships with patients or members of their families, lack of empathy)
9. Failure to maintain and safeguard the confidentiality of patient and research participant information, including paper and electronic records, verbal communications, and social networking and electronic media sites
10. Failure to comply with college and program academic and clinical-related requirements (e.g., training, immunization, HIPAA)

DEFINITIONS:

PROCEDURE:

Procedures for Handling Breaches of Ethical and Professional Behavior Standards Violations of this Policy will be handled as follows:

Who May File

Complaints about possible breaches of ethical and professional behavior may be initiated by individuals within the College or Department/Section (students, faculty, staff, and administration) or by external sources (patients, families, visitors, extramural rotation sites, other agencies with which a student has had contact). If reported elsewhere, the initial complaint should be promptly forwarded to the MMC PA Program Director or directly to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies & Research. The formal complaint must be in writing, with a brief description of the evidence, and submitted within 10 University business days after discovery of the incident, exclusive of College or MMC PA Program breaks and academic intercessions.

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Complaints Review and Investigation; Sanctions

Any egregious unethical or unprofessional behavior must be reported to the MMC PA Program Director and could result in the student's being immediately suspended or dismissed from the program. Examples of egregious or unprofessional behavior would include, but are not limited to: patient endangerment, unacceptable patient management, inappropriate alteration of patient records, or behavior that poses a danger to persons or property or an ongoing threat of or disruption of the academic process. The MMC PA Program Director must consult with the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies & Research, the Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs and General Counsel and other officials as appropriate to determine if the matter should proceed under other applicable College policies. Should the MMC PA Program Director take the immediate action of suspending or dismissing a student from the program, the student may request a hearing under the MMC PA Program Academic Appeals Board process, as described below.

For less egregious unethical and unprofessional behavior, rather than filing a formal complaint about professional behavior, the faculty member or MMC PA Program Director may conclude (but is not required to conclude) that the incident is more appropriately treated as an instructional rather than a disciplinary matter. The faculty member or MMC PA Program Director will notify the Chair of the SPC of the decision. In such cases, the faculty member or SPC will contact the student directly to discuss the issue, provide feedback, and make suggestions for how the behavior at issue can be improved. If the faculty member or SPC believes that an effective resolution resulted from meeting with the student, no further action is required. The incident shall be documented in the student's file and may be used in the future, where applicable, to indicate a pattern, practice, failure to benefit from redirection.

In the event that the faculty member or SPC determines that giving the student feedback about issues of concern was not successful in resolving the issue or if the behavior is of a significant or serious nature (but not warranting immediate suspension or dismissal), a Professionalism Concerns Report (PCR) will be completed by the faculty member or SPC. The focus of this PCR process is educational, with the goal of helping the health professions student move forward successfully in coursework, clinical practice experience, and interactions within the Meharry community.

A PCR must be filed with the Chair of the SPC within 10 College business days from the time the behavior was observed or reported, exclusive of College breaks and academic intercessions.

Following receipt of the PCR, the Chair of the SPC will meet with the student to discuss ways in which the unprofessional behavior can be improved, thus allowing the student adequate

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opportunity to make appropriate behavioral changes. The student will be asked to sign the PCR to acknowledge that the PCR has been reviewed and may respond to the PCR by providing additional written information. The Chair of the SPC may require remedial action, such as a corrective action plan, mandated counseling or probationary status, which shall be noted on the PCR. The PCR is then forwarded to the MMC PA Program Director and to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies & Research, if applicable. The Chair of the SPC will give a report of the PCR at the next scheduled meeting of the committee.

In the event that a student fails on three occasions to meet the expected standards of ethical and professional conduct as documented by PCRs and/or documentation in the student's file, the SPC has the option to place the student on probation, suspend the student, or dismiss the student, depending on the nature of the student's behavior. Prior to any such action, the MMC PA Program Director and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies & Research will meet with the student, identify the concerns, identify the anticipated action, and provide the student an opportunity to present his/her version of events leading to the situation. Within 3 days of such meeting, the student will be provided notice of the action taken. If dissatisfied with the action taken, the student may request a hearing in accordance with the MMC Academic Appeals process.

Violations of the professionalism policy leading to a PCR will result in a notation being placed in the Physician Assistant Student Performance Evaluation (PASPE). The PASPE is the complete account of the students' performance in the MMC PA Program and serves as the Program Director's letter of recommendation for employers, state licensure boards, and institutions granting credentials and privileges. Adverse findings involving professional behaviors can negatively affect a graduate's ability to secure employment, obtain licensure, and/or credentialing/privileging. Maintaining compliance with the professionalism policy is essential to progress academically in the program.

Appeal Process

Students who are dismissed or suspended from their program may appeal through the MMC PA Program Academic Appeals Policy. Students are directed to that policy for further instruction.

A student may not appeal an action taken simply because he/she does not agree with it.

EXHIBITS:

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SCIENCES
Meharry Medical Center
PROFESSIONALISM CONCERNS REPORT

Please type or print all entries.

Student Name

Course (Name & Course Number)*or Incident Site

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Name of Course Director or PA Program Representative completing the form (type/print legibly)	Date of Incident(s):
Signature of Course Director or PA Program Representative completing the form (required)	Date Discussed with Student:
Date:	

*If applicable

This report is prepared when a student exhibits behavior not consistent with the Student Professional Behavior in the PA Program Policy. It is intended to assist the student in meeting professionalism expectations in academic, professional or administrative settings. Improvement in the area(s) noted below is needed in order to meet the standards of professionalism inherent in being a physician assistant.

Check the appropriate category(ies). Comments are required.

Integrity & Honesty

- The student provided false information in an academic, professional or administrative setting.
 - The student acted outside the scope of his/her role in an academic, professional or administrative setting.
 - The student presented the work of others as his/her own.
 - The student used his/her professional position for personal advantage.
 - The student used the physical or intellectual property of others without permission or attribution.
 - Other behavior that demonstrated lack of integrity:
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Patient-Centered Care & Patient-Safety

- The student did not act in the best interest of the patient.
 - The student did not demonstrate sensitivity to the needs, values or perspectives of patients, family members or caregivers.
 - The student did not establish appropriate rapport with patients, family members or caregivers.
 - The student did not demonstrate openness/responsiveness to the patient's ethnic and cultural background.
 - The student did not respond to patient needs in a timely, safe or effective manner.
 - Other unprofessional behavior related to Patient Centered Care:
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Respect

- The student did not demonstrate respect for the rights of others in academic or professional settings.
 - The student did not demonstrate respect in interactions with others.
 - The student did not establish or maintain appropriate boundaries with patients, family members, fellow students, faculty or staff.
 - The student did not demonstrate equal respect for all persons, regardless of, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability or socioeconomic status.
 - The student did not demonstrate respect for the confidentiality rights of patients, research participants or others.
 - Other behavior that demonstrated lack of respect:
-

Service & Working within the Team

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- The student did not function, collaboratively within the healthcare team.
- The student did not demonstrate sensitivity to the requests of the healthcare team.
- The student did not demonstrate the ability to collaborate with students, faculty and staff in a learning environment.
- Other behavior that impeded collaboration:

Responsibility

- The student was tardy, absent, and/or misses deadlines/appointments.
- The student was disruptive or rude.
- The student needed continual reminders in the fulfillment of responsibilities.
- The student did not accept responsibility for his/her actions, recommendations or errors.
- The student could not be relied upon to complete his/her responsibilities in a timely manner.
- The student did not adhere to policies, procedures and/or instructions.
- The student did not dress in attire appropriate for the setting.
- The student failed to follow, and/or manipulated clinic policies, including those for patient assignment and management.
- The student failed to adhere to protective equipment and/or infection control guidelines.
- Other irresponsible behavior:

Responsiveness, Adaptability & Self-Improvement

- The student was resistant or defensive when provided with constructive feedback.
- The student did not demonstrate awareness of his/her own limitations and/or willingness to seek help.
- The student resisted adopting recommendations from faculty or others to improve learning or performance.
- The student did not demonstrate adaptability in a patient care, classroom or laboratory environment.
- The student did not correct his/her errors when were brought to his/her attention.
- Other behavior that impeded self-improvement:

Comments: Briefly describe the specifics of the incident – who, what, when, where. Attach additional information as needed.

To remedy the professionalism concerns listed on this report this student needs further education or assistance with the following:

----- *This section is to be completed by the student (optional)* -----

Comments (use back or attach additional information if desired)

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I have read this evaluation and discussed it with the Course Director or other PA Program Representative.

Student signature

Date

Your signature indicates that you have read the report, and it has been discussed with you. It does not represent your agreement or disagreement with the PCR. If you disagree or want to comment, you are encouraged to comment in the space above. The PCR will be sent to the Dean's office. A copy will be placed in the student's file and a notation will be placed in the student's Physician Assistant Student Performance Evaluation summary at the completion of enrollment.