RESEARCH ARTICLE

Development of standards of professionalism for the faculty members of kurdistan university of medical sciences

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Abstract

Introduction: University is one of the most important educational systems whose major objective is institutionalization of the best behaviors in people through education. This will happen if the teachers meet the requirements of students, society and their profession. This study was conducted to develop the standards of professionalism for the faculty members of Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods: This qualitative content analysis study was carried out on the faculty members of Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences. Six standards were derived out of the teachers' collaboration and focus-group meetings. The outcome of meetings was submitted to the faculty members for organization in three rounds using Delphi technique, from which several standards and a number of ethical codes were extracted.

Results: A total of six standards were derived out of the results, each with a number of ethical codes as follows: standard 1: general domain, with 13 ethical codes; standard 2: leadership, including classroom leadership, with 24 ethical codes and university or academic institution leadership, with 10 ethical codes; standard 3: provision of favorable learning environment in classroom by the teacher, with 18 ethical codes; standard 4: dominance over the course content, with 17 ethical codes; standard 5: facilitation of students' learning by the teacher, with 17 ethical codes and standard 6: teachers' intellectual reflection and contemplation on the teacher's role and teaching, with 8 ethical codes.

Conclusion: Observation of standards of professionalism in education increases the quality of education, followed by improved quality of learning environment and moral development of students and society. Thus, it seems that an agreement between the teachers and academic institution and observing the standards of professionalism are significant measures to be taken in accordance with the students' academic and ethical development.

Key Words: professionalism, academic members, Standards, Behavior.

Introduction

Education is the backbone of every culture and civilization, and philosophy of pedagogy and education system distinguishes societies and cultures from each other, such that the cultures can be differentiated according to the values of their education and pedagogical system. University is one of the most important educational systems that is aimed to institutionalize the most supreme behaviors via education. This objective is accomplished if the teachers fulfill the requirements of students, society and their profession [1], training the students being the most significant requirement. Teachers, owing to their profession, have responsibilities called professional ethics. They includes two parts: teacher's ethical responsibilities in their teaching role and teacher's responsibilities in their nurturing role. The ethical responsibilities of teachers in teaching are the same ethical standards in education which include all matters that need to be taken into account in the teaching/learning process. The

teacher's responsibilities in their nurturing role, however, are those that the teacher, as a model, should be committed to [2].

According to Iranian Ethics Training Institute (MAPA) statement, profession is equivalent to job or business in Persian language. However, some careers have characteristics that differentiate them from the other ones; this group of careers are called profession in Latin. Profession is an open declaration along with a letter of commitment; medical, clerical, legal and teaching practices are known as profession. Accordingly, profession has the following characteristics: the people holding a profession need a special knowledge and skill, the members of the profession are given a special privilege by the community and community expects them to prefer the society's benefits to their own benefits in providing social services [3].

Professionalism is a multidimensional term that involves institutional, social and historical expectations [4]. Hidden curriculum is one of the factors affecting professionalism [5]. It is a kind of unofficial learning in which the students are unconsciously involved and is irrelevant to the course content [6]. Teacher-student and colleague-principal interaction, making decisions in specific situations, clothing style, communication skills, etc. are examples of hidden curriculum in education. Development of standards can somehow influence the hidden curriculum, i.e. whatever the student learns in academic environment can be planned.

Based on the definition of profession and that teaching is known as a profession, it is necessary to have codes and standards. In most sophisticated universities of the world, standards have been developed in this regard. However, based on a review of literature in the Iranian context, it is unfortunate to say there is no evidence indicating the presence of such standards in the education system of ministry of health and even in ministry of science. It should be noted that medical universities play a pivotal role in creating a pleasant and favorable educational environment. This is achieved only if professionalism is observed in all their interactions with students, colleagues, staff, managers and patients. Therefore, the first step to be taken in promoting educational professionalism is development of standards, followed by their implementation accordingly. In this study, an attempt was made to develop and localize these standards according to the perspectives of the faculty members and international standards. This document was intended to develop ethical standards for the faculty members to learn and implement in teaching theoretical and clinical sciences. Great developments are hoped to occur in the realm of education in line with formulation and implementation of professionalism in teaching.

Methods

This qualitative content analysis study was performed to develop a set of teaching standards and ethical codes for the university faculty members. In qualitative content analysis, writings, statements and other information are so organized that lead to development of concepts.

This study was carried out in two phases: in the first phase, a meeting was held with the faculty members. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and all faculty members of Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences were formally invited to the meeting. The required explanations were included in the invitation letters. A total of 70 faculty members, including the university dean and some vice-chancellors attended the meeting. They were divided into 7 groups, each with 10 members. At the beginning of the meeting, the groups were asked to discuss the teaching standards or characteristics of a good teacher. Therefore, each group formed a focus group and discussed their ideas on the topic. All views presented in each group were recorded by a secretary, who had been appointed beforehand. Each group was managed by a facilitator who also undertook the responsibility of secretarial work.

In the second phase of the study, the perspectives of the faulty members, recorded by the secretaries in the form of notes, were analyzed and several themes were extracted. The themes were then categorized into six categories as standards with several subcategories as ethical codes. The draft, obtained through Delphi method, was delivered to 20 faculty members who had attended the meeting. This was performed in three rounds and the results obtained in each round were organized by the researchers and redelivered to the faculty members to evaluate and revise in terms of achievability, objectivity, practicality, measurability and diction.

Results

The participants of this study were the faculty members of Kurdistan University f Medical Sciences with academic degrees from master's to subspecialty and academic ranks from lecturer to professor. The results of this study were classified into six standards, each with a number of ethical codes as follows: 1) general domain, with 13 ethical codes; 2) leadership, including classroom leadership, with 26 ethical codes and university or academic institution leadership, with 10 ethical codes; 3) providing a favorable educational environment in classroom by the teacher, with 18 ethical codes; 4) dominance over the course content, with 17 ethical codes; 5) facilitating students' learning by the teacher, with 17 ethical codes and 6) teachers' intellectual reflection and contemplation on the teacher's role and teaching, with 8 ethical codes.

Standard 1: General domain, observing the academic

dignity and behavior.

1. Commitment to the system and rules governing the country.
2. Commitment to university rules and regulations, including educational, research and cultural rules and accepting the macro-strategies and policies addressing the violations and unfavorable events.
3. Preserving the privacy of students while training and monitoring them.
4. Providing the concerned units with complete and appropriate documentations related to activity in different domains such as education research, lesson plan, syllabus, test analysis, etc. in due time.
5. Avoiding disclosure of test questions and switching or manipulating papers.
6. Commitment to academic dignity and appropriate human conduct for all people at university and outside the university boundaries.
7. Avoiding relationships that lead to exploitation of colleagues, learners, patients or their relatives for emotional, research, economic or sexual purposes.
8. Use of clothing that increases dignity and placidity and avoidance of tight and peculiar clothes.
9. Having positive attitude toward humanitarian social services and being pioneer in doing such services.
10. Using proper clothing in clinical settings, wearing a white clean gown during clinical training.
11. Respecting the patients in clinical settings, listening carefully to them and their families, providing them with all solutions and options and helping them to select the best and least-costly treatment plan.
12. Valuing the patient as a human with the right of choosing.
13. Using comprehensible language in clinical settings to communicate with the patients and their families.
14. Standard 2.1. Classroom leadership
15. Having classroom management ability.
16. Making an attempt to provide a friendly atmosphere by creating positive interaction between student and teacher.
17. Making and sharing face to face and effective communication with all students.
18. Applying appropriate behavioral patterns in classroom (teacher's character and personality as a human model).
19. Providing similar educational opportunities for the learners in clinical and laboratory trainings.
20. Using the results of formative exams to recognize the students' academic problems and weaknesses.
21. Using the results of formative tests to improve education and reform the teaching methods.
22. Constructing the exams exactly based on the introduced references and standards.
23. Creating a healthy and controlled environment in the class.
24. Using clothes that increase modesty and placidity and refraining from tight and unusual clothes.
25. Having peace and tolerance in class.
26. Being fair to all students.
27. Leaving the class after students in order to be responsive to those who have questions.
28. Saying frankly "I do not know" or not expressing ideas about the issues one does not have enough information.
29. Identifying the students' talents and referring the talented ones to the credited academic centers.
30. Consulting with the colleagues while feeling lack of experience about a specific subject.
31. Inquiring about the students' unusual and long absence and trying to help solve their problems as much as possible.
32. Applying the teaching methods that empower the students in problem solving and critical thinking.
33. Feeling responsibility fro all students' learning.
34. Using appropriate strategies to encourage the students with lack of motivation.
35. Calling the students by last name while addressing them.
36. Using a lesson plan by which all the topics approved by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution are covered until the end of the semester.
37. Constructing the exams based on all the topics covered and avoiding questions on topics that have not been taught in the classroom.
38. Communicating with students only about education and teaching and avoiding the issues that are irrelevant to the curriculum.
39. Using the official language of the country for teaching and presenting the materials.
40. Refraining from humiliating students in academic settings for any cause. Standard 2.2. University or academic institution leadership.

1. Being a perfect example of human standards in all professional dimensions.
2. Being able to make effective communication with colleagues, subordinates and superiors.
3. Making maximal effort to transfer the information of new directives and rules to colleagues.
4. Crating a positive academic atmosphere and boosting motivation among the teachers and personnel.
5. Making an attempt to come up with university, inter-university, national and international research proposals to promote the academic level of university.
6. Evaluating the quality of courses provided to the teachers in line with promotion of teachers' empowerment workshops

and revising the existing guidelines and standards regularly.

7. Being informed of and complying with the university regulations and rules.

8. Being informed of the academic status of university according to the latest rankings.

9. Being responsible toward promotion and development of the academic status of university and making maximum effort accordingly (doing research, publishing books, etc.).

10. Having a sense of responsibility toward students, society and patients.

Standard 3. Providing a favorable academic environment in the class by the teacher.

1. Having physical and mental readiness for teaching.

2. Being informed of and interested in creating an effective educational environment.

3. Considering the cultural, sexual, economic and social differences of students and showing a respectful behavior accordingly.

4. Recognizing the individual differences of students (intelligence, former experiences, learning style and language) and implementing appropriate teaching strategies and methods.

5. Making use of diverse teaching methods in accordance with the syllabus.

6. Having proper knowledge, expertise and attitude in communication skills and empowering oneself to implement them.

7. Using comprehensible language while teaching the new concepts and subjects.

8. Applying appropriate strategies to reform the attitude toward the professional responsibilities of students.

9. Encouraging students to promote the social value of their profession.

10. Cooperating with colleagues to create a favorable academic environment.

11. Showing a modest behavior toward the students with anti-social behavior and referring them to the counseling centers, if necessary, for diagnosis and solving their mental and psychological complications.

12. Allowing all students, even those who disagree, to express their ideas in educational discussions without the fear of punishment, retaliation and revenge.

13. Providing suitable theoretical and clinical academic manuals for students.

14. Providing complete assistance and monitoring of educational responsibilities of learners according to their needs and experiences.

15. Designing as much fair and objective evaluation as possible without any bias.

16. Evaluating students based on the planned schedule and providing adequate time to answer the questions.

17. Evaluating students in accordance with educational objectives and the course content presented in the class, laboratory and clinical settings.

18. Running a discussion with learners to show the complexity of the subject and to involve higher levels of clinical thinking and reasoning.

Standard 4. Dominance over course content.

1. Performing a needs analysis, in addition to following the syllabus, using different resources such as the perspectives of the professionals, critical events, error analysis and duty analysis to determine the content.

2. Considering the expectations of students, patients, community and other professions from the graduates.

3. Preparing the instructional materials from reliable sources and updating them.

4. Coordinating the views of teachers, policymakers and society for preparation of instructional content.

5. Organizing and implementing the instructional content according to the educational objectives included in the syllabus and lesson plan.

6. Having adequate control over educational content.

7. Selecting the educational objectives according to the academic level of learners.

8. Organizing the educational content scientifically and appropriately.

9. Trying to minimize the educational content required for learning as much as possible.

10- Makin an effort to localize the educational content required for learning.

11. Consulting with the colleagues, including doctors, nurses, etc. to present the educational content to learners.

12. Cooperating in curriculum revision programs.

13. Participating in regular professional training and empowerment programs.

14. Making a logical connection between new and old course subjects to make the learning meaningful.

15. Making an association between theoretical and clinical topics in medical sciences.

16. Making a connection between the instructed content and its application.

17. Announcing the transition from one topic to the new ones and highlighting the main points of the lesson.

Standard 5. Facilitating the students' learning by the teacher.

1. Providing the learners with the educational objectives of each session, including both theoretical and clinical ones at the beginning of teaching.

2. Motivating the students by asking question, showing picture, posing problems, etc. and making them actively involved in the learning process.

3. Using various teaching methods, taking into account the

learning styles and educational content.

4. Using learner-centered approaches such as small group discussions, problem-based learning, etc., according to the educational content.

5. Using the educational technology appropriately.

6. Reinforcing problem solving skills, communication, creativity, rethinking, etc. in addition to educational content.

7. Teaching team work and leadership skills to learners and reinforcing team work among them.

8. Making use of active and learner-oriented learning styles such as small group discussions, problem-based learning, etc.

9. Making the learning objectives clear as much as possible by using pictures, graphs, tables, films, etc.

10. Bolstering the power of expression and ability to talk expressively and eloquently.

11.Being familiar with different evaluation methods, consistent with theoretical, practical and clinical content.

12. Making constructive evaluation, i.e. using the results of evaluation to solve the academic problems of learners.

13. Being familiar with and practically applying clinical evaluation methods such as Min-CEX, DOPS, OSCE, etc.

14. Reinforcing the learners' learning by providing immediate feedback and appropriate methods (expressing the student's strengths first, followed by weaknesses so that the strengths cover the weaknesses).

15. Maintaining the learners' enthusiasm by enlivening the educational materials and using one's and others' learning experiences.

16. Concentrating and highlighting the main points of the lesson.

17. Summarizing the instructed materials at the end of each session.

Standard 6. Teacher's intellectual reflection and contemplation on the teacher's role and teaching.

1. Consulting with colleagues while lacking enough knowledge about a subject.

2. Being able to self-evaluate and identify one's strong points and weak points.

3. Being diligent to eliminate or improve the weaknesses by attending relevant empowerment programs.

4. Reinforcing intellectual reflection and contemplation skills to enhance the learners' performance.

5.Reflecting on the teaching individually or together with students after each theoretical or clinical presentation.

6. Using the results of reflection to enhance the teaching-learning process.

7. Consulting with colleagues while not having adequate experience about a subject.

8. Holding a review and analysis meeting at the end of the course and before the start of exams so that the learners

freely discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the course and provide the teacher with feedback.

Discussion and conclusion

Given the significance of professional conduct in education, especially in medical education, it seems necessary to develop a set of standards accordingly. Therefore, the current study was designed to develop the standards of professionalism in teaching. The results obtained from the discussion of the faculty members in focus groups using Delphi technique were classified into six categories: general domain, leadership, provision of a favorable educational environment in the class by the teacher, dominance over the course content, facilitation of the students' learning by the teacher, and intellectual reflection and contemplation of teacher on the teacher's role and teaching. Then, each category was divided into several subcategories based on a review of literature and perspectives of the educational authorities and subject matter experts.

Professional ethics and behavior have long been considered important in various societies. Philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Dewey, have emphasized the development of character in society. The teachers' moral education can have positive or negative effects on the learners' character [1]. The first step in student's ethical development is the teacher's commitment to personal morality and the second step is objective manifestation of morality in the teacher's behavior, i.e. the sameness of words and deeds. This is the same nurturing dimension of teacher's role, which seems to be more important than the training dimension [2], because the individual is involved in it in all life situations, including job, family and society. A teacher's academic behavior and conduct should be in accordance with the regulations and rules governing the country and academic communities. This in turn transfers the positive values to students and leads to moral development of students, followed by the ethical development of society, as a result. Thus, there are two channels for personal moral development and professionalism. First, the professionalism subjects, including accountability, empathy, altruism, confidentiality, etc. are required to be included in the curriculum and second, the nurturing role of teachers and their exemplary position should be taken into account, which is the same hidden curriculum.

Teachers should be capable of leading a group of people either in a classroom or in an academic institution. Hence, they need to undertake the required trainings to be able to make appropriate decisions in different situations and to be an ideal example for the students both in pedagogical and managerial professions. The teachers must be able to create a favorable educational environment in the classroom. To

this end, they should be interested in teaching and provide the students with a friendly environment with no fear and anxiety.

Teachers should have adequate control over the course content to be able to completely answer the students' questions and cooperate with them to demonstrate the materials and get the higher levels of cognitive domain involved. Teachers should also make their maximum effort to facilitate learning and use various learning strategies for different learning styles. They should intellectually contemplate and reflect on their teaching, do away with their weaknesses by using the views of the colleagues and self-evaluation and make an attempt to enhance their strengths. Association of American Educators asserts that teachers are responsible for creating an educational environment that foster the potential talents and abilities of all learners. Teachers should consider such issues as commitment and obeying the civil laws and rites, perseverance, accountability, loyalty, conscientiousness, respecting the law and others and even self-respect.

There are many methods to promote professionalism in education. Teaching professionalism can be basically and structurally initiated from curriculum, especially for those who are potentially involved in education. Instructing the basics of teaching along with professionalism is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of teacher training centers and any other academic institution toward postgraduate students. Since the educated individuals, who are perfect example for students, undertake the burden of teaching, knowledge of principles of professionalism can greatly affect the moral education of an individual. The next step is assessing the professional performance and giving feedback to those who are involved in education. It is evident that providing feedback eliminates the weak points and reinforces the strong points, and reinforcement or institutionalization of a behavior among the members of society turns it into a norm which is eventually internalized in other people in the community [7]. Hence, with an emphasis on education and training and encouraging professional teachers, education and academic environment along with its quality are going to be affected, thereby training the individuals that, in addition to academic perfection, will gain a transcendent and sophisticated personality. This process will be repeated and these sophisticated educators will train the competent and meritorious people who will be able to lead the society toward moral development and excellence.

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, it is essential that universities and academic institutions pay more attention to the moral development of students during their academic education and after that. Accordingly, all people who become potentially involved in education in the future should be required to pass training courses on the fundamentals of

teaching and universities and academic institutions need to make their ultimate effort to empower them in the realm of education. Further, the teachers with specialized degrees in education should receive employment priority, the contracts made with them should not be lifetime and should be extended according to the evaluation of their annual performance in all aspects, and their weak points and strengths should be officially reported to them. Moreover, teachers need to accept and sign a professionalism document. In addition, there should be programs for training the teachers, as perfect examples, and structured curricula for promoting and evaluating professionalism. Finally, curriculum developers are suggested to include the principles of professionalism in all majors and academic levels. It seems that the principles such as morality, altruism, empathy, confidentiality, etc. need to be taught form the very childhood.

The standards and codes derived from this research are considered an external stimulant for the accomplishment of professional duties and should be presented to the teachers at the beginning of their employment or any other sort of cooperation with academic institution. They should also sign a written letter of commitment and agree to fully observe the agreement. These initiations need to be reinforced and internalized by personal reflection on practice and using reflection to enhance their awareness of personal and professional standards of academic behavior [8].

Conflicts of Interest
There are no conflicts to declare.

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