Guidelines for Professionalism
The American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ABMGG)

I. Introduction

The mission of The American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics (“ABMGG”), a member Board of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), is to serve the public, the community of genetics professionals, and other medical providers by promoting high standards of excellence in medical genetics. To accomplish this, the ABMGG:

1) accredits training programs;
2) credentials and certifies practitioners of medical genetics, and
3) fosters life-long learning through maintenance of certification.

This document sets forth the professional behavior that is expected from the community of genetics professionals whose training, initial credentialing and/or ongoing certification are the responsibilities of the ABMGG. These standards are designed to further the ultimate goal of serving the interests of the patients for whom we care, the clients for whom we perform laboratory testing, and society as a whole.

II. Professionalism

Professionalism is the basis of medicine’s contract with society. Essential to this contract is public trust in the genetics profession, which depends on the integrity of both individual genetics providers and the profession as a whole [1]. Ensuring public trust mandates that genetics providers’ actions are in the best interests of patients and clients, that they set and maintain standards of competence and integrity, and that they provide expert advice to society on how genetic knowledge is to be applied to healthcare.

The ABMS has defined professionalism as follows:

“Medical professionalism is a belief system about how best to organize and deliver health care, which calls on group members to jointly declare ("profess") what the public and individual patients can expect regarding shared competency standards and ethical values, and to implement trustworthy means to ensure that all medical professionals live up to these promises.” [2]

The ABMS believes that “…For medical professionalism to function effectively there must be interactive, iterative, and legitimate methods to debate, define, declare, distribute, and enforce the shared standards and ethical values that medical professionals agree must govern medical work. … Making standards explicit, sharing them with the public, and enforcing them, is how the profession maintains its standing as being worthy of public trust” [3]. In this document, the ABMGG makes explicit its criteria for what constitutes professionalism by genetics providers.

Medical genetics professionalism is divided into three broad areas:

A. Practicing high quality medical genetics in ways that adhere to accepted
standards of care, avoid or mitigate conflict of interests and earn the trust of the public and our patients;

B. Upholding ethical standards in our interactions with patients and clients, our relationships with colleagues, and our obligation to expand and disseminate knowledge that benefits the profession and society;

C. Supporting, participating in, and protecting the integrity of the accreditation, credentialing and maintenance of certification processes.

The specific elements of professionalism that fall under these categories include:

A. Practicing high quality medical genetics in ways that adhere to accepted standards of care, avoid or mitigate conflict of interests and earn the trust of the public and our patients.

1) Resolving conflicts between the patient’s interest and outside interests or rules – Genetics professionals must resolve conflicts of interest that arise in the course of their professional duties and activities. Professionalism standards require geneticists to recognize, disclose and resolve situations that arise when restrictions or requirements of their employers, federal or state laws, or other outside interests do not serve the best interests of their patients or clients. In such circumstances, genetics professionals must disclose such conflicts and must make referrals to health care professionals or laboratory testing sites who will provide patients with the full range of services required to meet the appropriate standard of care. Failure to make patients aware of all such options, or to not make referrals to others because of conflict with outside interest or rules, does not serve the public and therefore is not compliant with professional standards of the ABMGG.

2) Resolving conflicts between standard of care and personal beliefs – The primary responsibility of genetic professionals is to the patient. Personal beliefs cannot change the established standard of care. Professionalism standards do not require that genetics professionals personally provide clinical or laboratory services contrary to their own political or religious beliefs. However, they cannot deprive patients of their right to obtain such services. Accordingly, in such circumstances, genetics professionals must recognize and disclose such conflicts, and must resolve these conflicts by making referrals to health care professionals or laboratory testing sites who will provide patients with the full range of services required to meet the appropriate standard of care. Failure to make patients aware of options required by the standard of care, or to not make referrals to others because of conflict with the professional's own personal beliefs, does not serve the public and therefore is not compliant with professional standards of the ABMGG.

3) Consultation – Genetics professionals must work collaboratively to optimize patient care by obtaining consultation and using the talents of other health professionals when indicated.

4) Quality of care – Genetics professionals must maintain clinical competence and work collaboratively with other professionals to reduce medical error, increase patient safety, minimize overuse of health care resources, and optimize outcomes of care.

5) Cost-effective medical care – Genetics professionals must be committed to providing health care that is based on the wise and cost-effective management
of limited clinical resources. Genetics professionals should not perform unnecessary tests and/or treatments on patients or clients.

B. Upholding ethical standards in our interactions with patients and clients, our relationships with colleagues, and our obligation to expand and disseminate knowledge that benefits the profession and society.

1) **Honesty with patients** – Information given to the patient before and after evaluation and treatment must be honest and empower patients to make informed decisions regarding consent to diagnostic testing and treatment. Genetics professionals should acknowledge to the patient if a medical error has occurred.

2) **Patient and client confidentiality** – Genetics professionals must safeguard patient identifiable health information.

3) **Appropriate patient and client relations** – Genetics professionals must never exploit patients or clients for any private purposes.

4) **Access to care** – Genetics professionals must share a commitment with other health providers to reducing or eliminating the financial and societal barriers to care.

5) **Professional ethics** -- Genetics professionals must avoid lapses in professionalism and unprofessional behavior including: cheating; lying; falsifying information; breaching patient or client confidentiality or requests for privacy.

6) **Scientific knowledge** – Genetics professionals must continue to advance and use scientific knowledge, and work to disseminate relevant information to patients, colleagues, and the public.

C. Supporting, participating in, and protecting the integrity of the accreditation, credentialing and maintenance of certification processes.

1) **Education** -- Genetics professionals must aid in defining and organizing educational and standard-setting processes for current and future professionals.

2) **Lifelong learning** – Genetics professionals must be committed to lifelong learning that maintains medical knowledge and clinical and team skills necessary for the provision of quality care.

3) **Self-regulation** -- Genetics professionals must participate in the process of self-regulation, which includes remediation and discipline of members who have failed to meet professional standards.

4) **Protecting the integrity of certification** -- Genetics professionals must avoid unethical behavior such as sharing of examination materials with others not authorized to see the materials; misrepresenting one’s educational background, certification status and/or professional experience; and failing to report misconduct.

III. Disciplinary Review

The ABMGG’s *Disciplinary Review Policy and Procedures* describes the grounds and procedures for disciplinary action, including revocation of certification, which may be taken against ABMGG candidates and diplomates for breach of professional or personal conduct. It was approved by the ABMGG Board of Directors on November 11, 2008, and is available on the ABMGG website at [http://www.abmg.org/pages/resources_appeal.shtml](http://www.abmg.org/pages/resources_appeal.shtml) or through the ABMGG Office.
The Board of Directors of the ABMGG has the sole power and authority to determine whether the evidence concerning a breach of professional or personal conduct is sufficient to constitute grounds for disciplinary action by the ABMGG.


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