


# The professional status of dental hygiene



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Outline

## Key Topics

- Defining professions
- Who decides?
- Implications
- Taking action

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## Defining "Professions"

4 approaches to ponder...

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## The Ethical Approach

*Professionals do the right thing.*



Bust of Seneca (4 BC - AD 65)  
Photo by Jean-Pol Grandmot

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Defining "Professions"

## Ethical Approach

- Roots in Greek philosophy of stoicism
- Professions as "professing" to do the right thing
- Seeking virtue, not fame or fortune
- Avoiding strong emotions
- Remaining detached

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Defining "Professions"

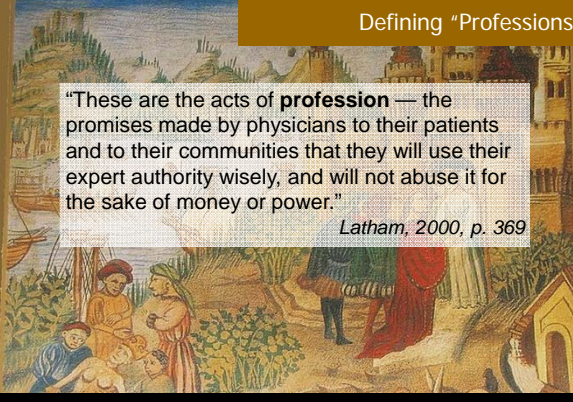
## Ethical Approach, Part II

- Education in Medieval European universities
- Classical curriculum
- Christian ethos of calling and service to the public
- Examinations to enter a program or to prove competence on exit
- **Expert authority**

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Defining "Professions"

"These are the acts of **profession** — the promises made by physicians to their patients and to their communities that they will use their expert authority wisely, and will not abuse it for the sake of money or power."  
*Latham, 2000, p. 369*



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Defining "Professions"

**To be a professional one must...**

- Obtain the right education, the right skills
- Profess to do the right thing
- Cultivate the right values
- Live by those high standards

- *These are the roots of professional status...*  
 - *But a very tall order*

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**The Checklist Approach**  
*More inclusive but perhaps not as useful...*



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Defining "Professions"

**The Checklist...**

- A profession involves a skill based on theoretical knowledge.
- The skill requires extensive and intensive training and education.
- The professional must demonstrate competence by passing a test.
- The profession is organized and it is represented by associations of distinctive character.
- Integrity is maintained by adherence to a code of conduct.
- Professional service is altruistic.

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Defining "Professions"

- The professional assumes responsibility for the affairs of others.
- Professional service is indispensable for the public good.
- Professionals are licensed, so their work is sanctioned by the community.
- Professionals are independent practitioners, serving individual clients.
- They have a fiduciary relationship toward their clients.
- They do their best to serve their clients impartially without regard to any special relationship.
- They are compensated by fee or fixed charge.

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Defining "Professions"

- Professionals are highly loyal to their colleagues.
- They regularly contribute to professional development.
- Their prestige is based on guaranteed service.
- They use individual judgment in applying principles to concrete problems.
- The work is not manual.
- Profits do not depend on capital.
- Professional status is widely recognized.

Kultgen, 1988  
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## The Ideology Approach

*Professions as “a mystification which unconsciously obscures real social structures and relations”*



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“The Parsonian model of professionalism was torn apart by critical scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s... the Parsonian view had ignored the exploitative actions of professional **monopolists**, who were in fact hungry not merely for status but also for both money and power... it had ignored the actual **failure of professional institutions** to guarantee the quality of their members’ work.”

Latham, 2000, p. 365

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“I see professionalization as the process by which producers of special services sought to **constitute and control a market for their expertise**. Because marketable expertise is a crucial element in the structure of modern inequality, professionalization appears also as a collective assertion of special social status and as a collective process of upward social mobility.”

Larson, 1977, p. xvi

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## The Cultural Approach

*Professions as cultural communities*



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## Defining “Professions”

### Why Professions First Emerged...

– “The immediate motive was the desire for social intercourse with those who were doing the same work and facing the same problems. Association took the shape of **dining clubs** where ‘shop’ was talked”

– Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1964, p. 301

– “There was a community of men engaged in the institutionalised study of medicine, albeit a small one, in each of the English universities, which allowed the emergence of an **esprit de corps**.”

– O’Day, 2000, p. 189

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“These uncommon occupations tend to become ‘real’ communities whose members share a relatively permanent affiliation, an identity, personal commitment, specific interests, and general loyalties.”

Larson, 1977, p. xviii

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“Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected.”

Hall, S., 1996, p. 5

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Defining “Professions”

**Defined by the Appeal**

- Common values
- Interaction
- Sharing
- Improving the craft
- *Distinct* identity

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Okay, but what is culture?

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Defining “Professions”

**Culture is composed of:**

- **Knowledge** and recipes
- Humanly fabricated **tools**
- Products of **social** action
- All of which may be drawn upon in the further conduct of social life

– Hall, J.R., 1990, p. 20

Does dental hygiene meet this test?

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Defining “Professionalism”

|          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| Ethics   | Checklist |
| Ideology | Cultural  |

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**Who decides...**

... whether dental hygiene is a profession or not?

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Who decides?

**Ethics Approach**

– Primarily members and their peers

“Parsons concluded, the professional project is successful only because professionals are motivated primarily by the desire for status and reputation — both among their peers and in society at large — rather than by the desire for money or power.”

*Latham, 2000, p. 364*

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Who decides?

**Ideology Approach**

– Primarily members public and state

“...it is ultimately through public opinion that professions establish the power that enables them to achieve legal protection.”

*Abbott, 1988, p. 60*

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Who decides?

**Checklist Approach**

– Primarily academics

- But also anyone with a checklist

“Sociologists have not found a scheme of classification that results in generalizations with any significant predictive power. Instead, statements in the various theories take the form of deductions from ideal-typical models that match real occupations only approximately...”

*Kultgen, 1988, pp. 68-59*

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Who decides?

**Cultural Approach**

– Members, their associations, educators

- Ultimately, everyone
- Fostering a desire to build and sustain a culture of professionalism within an occupation
- Changing the meaning of the occupation

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Over to you...



What does professional status (or lack thereof) mean for dental hygienists today and in the future?

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Focus Group Findings



Pharmacists and nurse practitioners on professionalism, identity and communication

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## Implications

**Methodology**

- Six focus groups with Ontario pharmacists and nurse practitioners (n = 41)
  - Questions around professional identity and the communication practices of professional associations
  - Whether and how professional culture helps or hinders interprofessional communication
- Thematic analysis

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## Implications

**Three Key Themes**

- Anxiety
- Communication
- Identity

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## Implications

**Anxiety**

- “That (CP article) was silly. It was **infuriating** to read and I felt... I don't know. I feel like physicians are... they're scared.” – NP
- “I think a little bit because we're so... we're still so **unsure** of where we are and what we do and the fact that there are still bills out there determining what our scope of practice is and what we can and can't do. Then maybe it undermines people's confidence in us because we're still not sure as a profession what we can and can't do.” – NP

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## Implications

**Anxiety**

- “I don't know, because this one almost seems, like it's **insulting**. It's *really* insulting and it's putting us down.” – Ph
- “If you're bombarded by the negative stuff a few times in a row, you start to feel a little gun shy, like 'ah geeze, you know, every time I call a doctor am I going to have to **justify** what I'm saying?” Ph

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## Implications

**Anxiety**

- “I thought this, uhm, the collaboration one... I was just: **where was the NP in that?** No and that was intentional I'm sure. Totally intentional. I think that was a glaring absence, and consistent with their whole spiel against nurse practitioners.” – NP
- ... when you read the article they **don't even refer to pharmacists**. They refer to specialists; they refer to everything else they collaborate with in the actual statistics. – Ph

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**Implications**

Identity and representation matter to professionals; it can be a source of great pride or real anxiety.

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## Implications

**Communication by the Profession**

- “One thing that RNAO has really stepped up in the last five or six years is to go after what’s appropriate for the scope of regular nursing practice and extended nursing practice and nurse practitioners, so I **applaud** them for that. And I think it’s a really important point.” – NP
- “We’ve gotta ignore this crap and we’ve gotta do our own good storytelling to the government. That’s... they’ve got the ultimate power and we’ve just gotta get **the public on our side** and get these stories out to the government.” – NP

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## Implications

**Communication by the Profession**

- “I think a lot of life is about marketing so if we were to **market ourselves** like this non-stop, constantly, we would probably be further ahead as professionals.” – Ph
- “That’s why I think it’s important to get the message out there that pharmacists do this stuff. **We don’t just come in and count and pour** and in three minutes you’re prescription is done.” – Ph

*The professional status of dental hygiene***Implications**

Professions value efforts by their organizations to represent them positively. Some demand it.

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## Implications

**Identity as a Profession**

- “I think it’s kind of like we’re more risk takers or, you know, followers of dreams, maybe. Because you know when we went through it there were no jobs for us. **We went with a hope and a prayer.**” – NP
- “... that’s one of the things that’s so satisfying about being a nurse practitioner in my view, is that you do have the **time** and the **tools** to look after a patient. And you have the resource of the physician when you need it. – NP

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## Implications

**Identity as a Profession**

- “... most of the public representation, if they have a pharmacist, they have them **counting pills on a tray**. OK? And basically what Bill 179 will do is separate us from the physical product.” – Ph
- “I was really thinking that it has something to do with the kind of person who gets into pharmacy, frankly. I think, I think **we’re a type of person that has compassion and caring not a lot of being pushy...**” – Ph

*The professional status of dental hygiene***Implications**

Knowledge and tools form a key part of professional identity.

So do shared values and history.

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## Taking Action

Ways to foster a shared sense of professionalism



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## Taking Action

### Individual Dental Hygienists

- Join
- Connect with others
- Set high standards
- Get involved
- Be an ambassador

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## Taking Action

### Connect with others; be an ambassador

- "Groups of us got together and wrote papers to send in and a lot of nurse practitioners played an important role, including the professional association - NPAO - to really lobby for some of those changes..." - NP
- "Pharmacists should start bragging a bit more and doing what we're supposed to do. I'll often tell people as I'm helping them, that 'this is what your pharmacist is supposed to do. This is why you pay a fee. This is what we can do for you. This is exactly what your pharmacist should do for you no matter where you go.'" - Ph

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## Taking Action

### Association Executives

- Reach out to members, the public, the news media and governments
- Connect and collaborate with other professions
- Foster shared identity
- Foster collective action

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## Taking Action

### Foster Collective Action

- "I was keeping up with the emails from our professional association: the NPAO. So I was getting these little email blurbs about it so I think most of my colleagues - I haven't talked to my peers at work but in the email world - are looking forward to it because it means the end of lists." - NP
- "There were opportunities to be involved in position papers through our professional association..." - NP
- "I was just going to say that, I mean, associations are really a necessary evil. We pay them to do this for us to grab our share of health care dollars and in terms of marketing..." - Ph

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## Taking Action

### Dental Hygiene Educators

- Integrate professionalism into the formal curriculum
- Integrate it into the informal curriculum
- Demonstrate professionalism

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## Taking Action

**Integrate Professionalism**

- “The school is regarded as a decisive middle term between the native and previously trained capacities of selected individuals and the emergence of the professional self, the identification of these individuals, by themselves and by society, as medical doctors” (Merton et al., 1957, p. viii).

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## Taking Action

- “... we can see how (schooling) also creates the foundation for a strong sense of occupational community. First, all who enter have aspired to that occupation and have chosen in advance to undertake any special course or examination for admission to training. Second, students are trained in batches or cohorts... Third, they are separated from other students in other schools of the university.”

– Freidson, 2001, pp. 100-101

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**Closing Thoughts**

About professions as cultural communities

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## Closing Thoughts

**Remember...**

- Meaning must be continually built up and repaired. It is fluid, not fixed.
- Identity is a “moveable feast” (Hall, Hell and McGrew, 1992, p. 277).
- Success begins when members share a genuine desire for a strong professional identity and for a profession whose meaning is positive and valued.

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## Closing Thoughts

**Thank you**

- Questions?

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