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The Canons of Ethics and Professionalism

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Every society must have a set of rules or laws by which it governs itself. Without laws, society does not exist. The American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. is a society of sorts. It has a governing body, it has several different departments (committees), with department heads (committee chairmen), and it has citizens (certifees). It has laws by which it governs. It also has a department of justice in the form of the character and fitness committee. The one thing that our society does not have is a police department.

If there is no police department, how effective can our society be? The answer to that question is at the very heart of the word professionalism. There are several dictionary definitions of professionalism. However, I have a very strong inner feeling that professionalism is not defined by words alone. I believe that professionalism in our society is a commitment to do the very best job that you are capable of doing on each and every case. This is not to say that you have to live up to any individual standard, but you must live up to the standards of practice in your community. If you're capable of doing better, then you should commit yourself to that level of excellence to which you're capable. I also believe that professionalism involves a commitment to your community: being an active participant in community affairs, being cognizant of the needs of the underprivileged of your community, and doing your fair share to alleviate their suffering.

Professionalism demands that a practitioner keep current of the knowledge of his profession by con-

tinued reading of technical manuscripts and attendance at seminars.

Professionalism is wanting to help in the day-to-day activities of the society by committee membership, by helping in the examination procedure, and by doing site evaluations.

All of these are ways in which I believe we can define professionalism in an idealistic way. The Canons of Ethics of the American Board of Certification does not really attempt to set standards of professionalism but it does set standards of conduct that, if breached, can lead to punitive action being taken.

Each and every certifee has received at least one copy of the Canons and if we all try to live up to the standards set forth in them, our patients will receive a better quality of care.

These standards are directed to the way in which we conduct ourselves in the day-to-day management of our patients as well as the manner in which we conduct our businesses and ourselves in general.

Rather than being idealistic, these standards are real. They were always meant to be the absolute minimum that our profession expects from us. Anyone who cannot live up to these standards should not receive the respect and recognition of his peers or the community.

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Canons of Ethical Conduct and the Law

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Since its inception in 1947, the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. has developed, perpetuated, and enforced a relatively straightforward and uncomplex set of rules for conduct in the profession of orthotics and prosthetics. Specifically, these rules are known as the Canons of Ethical Conduct and come under the jurisdiction of the Character and Fitness Committee, a permanent committee of the Board of Directors of ABC.

The impact of the Canons has been progressively larger as time has passed. In particular, as certification in the field of orthotics and prosthetics has become more and more important, the loss of suspension from such certification due to violations of the Canons of Ethical Conduct has become much more important.

Of course, canons of ethical conduct are nothing new. They have been around for hundreds of years.