

Dear Colleagues and friends,

Welcome to the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism 6th National conference, held in collaboration with the National Board of Medical Examiners which will address the theme of Medical Professionalism. Today's definition of medical professionalism is growing – from autonomy to accountability, from expert opinion to evidence-based medicine, and from self-interest to teamwork and mutual responsibility. For many, medical professionalism is the "heart and soul of medicine"; medicine being itself a moral enterprise.

In 2005, the Royal College of Physicians of London's Working Party on Medical Professionalism has defined medical professionalism concisely as (I quote) 'a set of values, behaviours and relationships that underpin the trust the public has in doctors, with doctors being committed to integrity, compassion, altruism, continuous improvement, excellence and teamwork' (end quote). In 2002, a combined North American and European Internal Medicine Boards project published the *Physician's Charter* – a declaration on medical professionalism requirements for the new millennium. It has consequently been endorsed by more than 120 medical organizations. The *Physician's Charter* consists of three essential principles (patient welfare; patient autonomy and social justice) and a set of ten professional duties (commitment to competence, honesty, confidentiality, relationships, quality of care, access to care, distribution of finite resources, scientific knowledge, managing conflicts, and responsibilities). But perhaps the first person who actually spoke of professionalism, although without calling it as such, was the 9th century Arab physician and philosopher إسحاق بن علي الرهاوي (Al Ruhawi). Al Ruhawi's most celebrated work is *Adab al-Tabib* ("Ethics of the Physician"), the earliest surviving Arabic work on medical ethics. Al-Ruhawi regarded physicians as "guardians of souls and bodies". The work consisted of twenty chapters on various topics related to medical ethics and professionalism.

Several forces are affecting the physician and his/her work such as patient care, market forces, advances in technology (to mention but a few) and consequently, physicians today experience profound obstacles to fulfilling the ideals of medical professionalism in practice. Hence the importance of this workshop which I hope will be of great benefit to all of us and will allow us to come up with a Charter of Medical Professionalism for Lebanon.

I take this opportunity to thank our visitors who came all the way from the US to be with us today and to wish us all a fruitful conference.