Elements of Professional Practice for Physicists

Prepared by the CAP Professional Affairs Committee
The Canadian Association of Physicists has established a professional designation:

- Professional Physicist (P.Phys)
- Although qualifying criteria have been established for applicants (to P.Phys), other aspects of professional practice have not been fully developed.

The purpose of this talk is to explore elements of professional practice.
Agenda

- What is professional practice?
- What are common elements of professional practice?
- What could P.Phys professional practice look like?
- Workshop: Closing the Gaps
What is Professional Practice?

- The term “professional practice” describes:
  - The legal obligations a member of a profession owes to himself, his clients/employers, other members of the profession, and the public in general,
  - The ethical obligations a member of a profession owes to himself, his clients/employers, other members of the profession, and the public in general, and
  - The manner in which a specific profession delivers its services to its clients.
Legal Obligations

- As professionals, a number of specific legal obligations arise:
  - Expanded “Duty of Care”, reflecting the services and expertise of the profession
  - Specific legal issues which arise when professional services are “sold” to the public
    - e.g. Contract Law
  - Expanded obligations related to Health, Safety and Environment, reflecting the services and expertise of the profession.
Ethical Obligations

- Similar to legal obligations, members of professions often carry extended ethical obligations.
- Most professional designations codify these obligations through Codes of Conduct (or similar), which include consideration of:
  - Clients / Employers
  - The Public
  - The profession and members of the profession
- P.Phys uses a Code of Ethics covering these concerns.
Obligations to Clients/Employers
(No lyin’, No cheatin’, No stealin’)

- Must work only in area of expertise
  - Work “out of discipline” must be fully disclosed
- Must use transparency with clients & employers
  - All issues must be fully disclosed.
  - All potential conflict of interest issues must be resolved.
  - Collaborations must be disclosed.
  - Sources must be disclosed.
  - All representations must be accurate.
  - Client confidences must be maintained.
Obligations to The Public
(No lyin’, No cheatin’, No stealin’)

- Must always ensure that professional activities (for clients) are aligned with the “public good”
  - This can be challenging at times
- When representing oneself professionally in public, a member must
  - Act in the best interests of the profession
  - Protect, to the extent practicable, client interests
  - Speak only to areas of expertise
Obligations to The Profession (No lyin’, No cheatin’, No stealin’)

- Must respect professional activities of other members
  - Conflict of interest situations must be resolved
  - Should not denigrate expertise of other members
    - The profession needs to manage these issues

- Have an obligation to report “unprofessional activities” of other members
  - This is the essence of self-regulation
Delivery of Services

- In general, services are always delivered is accordance with legal and ethical obligations
- However, the delivery of professional activities may reflect the nature of the profession, such as:
  - Specific expectations related to preparation and verification of professional activities
  - Requirements related to the use of professional standards
  - Requirements related to Quality programs
Other Considerations

- CAP will need to acknowledge “professional practice” as an organizational objective
  - Currently the objective is
    - “SUPPORTING PHYSICS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN CANADA”
Options for Improvement

- We examined the publically available documents from a variety of professional organizations (law, medicine, finance and technical) and identified four areas for improvement for P.Phys:
  - Upgraded Code of Ethics
  - Service delivery guidelines
  - Complaint resolution mechanism
  - Professional development requirements
What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 1

- An expanded Code of Ethics, reflecting the unique aspects of P.Phys:
  - Consider all (Academic, R&D, Industrial, Government) spheres of operation
  - Clear guidelines for the use of signature and seal.
  - Might want to include sustainability and environmental protection as part of societal obligations.
What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 2

- Specific guidelines regarding the delivery of services
  - Clarity around area and scope of practice.
  - Need to deal with “public practitioners” separately?
  - Specific guidelines for educators, researchers, and industrial workers?
  - Retirees and non-practitioners?
What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 3

- An internal body to investigate professional misconduct and/or complaints
  - Need to consider internal and external complaints
  - Often, there will be clear directions related to complaints available from the Profession’s website.
  - This is usually a significant undertaking because of the legalities involved.
What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 4

- Professional Development requirements
  - Usually a specific target (hrs/yr)
  - This can be challenging to organize and manage – self reporting is often used.
Workshop

- We will now begin the workshop portion of this talk ... Closing the gaps:
  1. An expanded Code of Ethics, reflecting the unique aspects of P.Phys:
  2. Specific guidelines regarding the delivery of services
  3. An internal body to investigate professional misconduct and/or complaints
  4. Professional Development requirement