

# Junior Doctors' Perception of Professionalism in Clinical Practice at Drs. H. Amri Tambunan General Hospital: A Qualitative Study

Jihan Mutiara Finkan<sup>1</sup>, Ermi Girsang<sup>2</sup>, Sri Lestari Ramadhani Nasution<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Public Health, Universitas Prima Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia

\*E-mail : jmutiara262@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Junior doctors are at a critical early stage in their medical careers, where professionalism plays a central role in ensuring the quality of healthcare services. This study aims to evaluate the perceptions of junior doctors regarding professionalism in clinical practice at Drs. H. Amri Tambunan General Hospital, as well as to identify the influencing factors and challenges faced in its application. **Method:** This research employed a qualitative descriptive design, with data collected through observations and in-depth interviews with five junior doctors from various outpatient departments. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as introduced by Braun and Clarke (2021). **Result:** The findings indicate that although junior doctors generally have a good conceptual understanding of professionalism, its implementation is often hindered by high workloads, environmental pressures, and a lack of structural support and effective role models. **Conclusion:** This study provides valuable insights for healthcare institutions to develop training programs and support systems that can strengthen the professionalism of junior doctors in medical practice.

**Keywords:** *Professionalism, Junior Doctors, Clinical Practice, Health Services*

## INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, junior doctors faced heightened stress levels due to increased workloads, especially in emergency care. Burnout emerged as a significant concern, compounded by global physician shortages threatening healthcare quality. As early-career physicians undergoing internships or residencies, junior doctors play a crucial role in healthcare delivery. Professionalism—encompassing clinical competence, integrity, empathy, and communication—is vital in fostering doctor-patient relationships and medical teamwork. However, real-world application often differs from academic theory, challenged by work pressures, inexperience, and lack of systemic support or role models. In Indonesia, limited research on junior doctors' perceptions of professionalism highlights the need to develop relevant training and support systems.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative analytical descriptive design with a case study approach. It involved non-experimental methods such as observations and in-depth interviews with five junior doctors using cross-sectional data collection. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase approach, was applied to identify emerging themes relevant to the study's objectives.

## RESULTS

The findings are categorized into key themes drawn from relevant theories:

### **Professional Socialization Theory**

#### **Career Socialization Stages**

Junior doctors were in the early phase of professional socialization, transitioning from academic settings to clinical practice, starting to apply professional values learned in school. “We learn a lot through direct interaction, like communicating well with patients and maintaining professional ethics.” (Informant 3)

#### **Social and Cultural Influence**

Workplace culture, including mentor communication styles and hierarchical dynamics, shaped their internalization of professionalism. “If our mentor is supportive and willing to listen, we feel more confident and learn better.” (Informant 4)

### **Career Mobility Theory**

#### **Structural Mobility**

Career development was seen as dependent on institutional structures such as rotation systems and mentorship. “When a mentor actively teaches and exemplifies professionalism, we grow better.” (Informant 3)

#### **Horizontal vs. Vertical Mobility**

Rotation across departments provided broad experience, while leadership roles increased responsibility and motivation. “Being trusted to lead night shifts made me feel appreciated and motivated.” (Informant 4)

### **Workload Theory**

#### **Physical and Mental Load**

Long hours and emotional exhaustion challenged professionalism. “Being exhausted with too many patients can make us emotional or affect how we communicate with them.” (Informant 2)

#### **Coping Strategies**

Doctors employed strategies like task prioritization and peer support to maintain professionalism. “When really tired, we help each other. At least, we maintain good communication.” (Informant 3)

### **Professional Motivation Theory**

#### **Intrinsic Motivation**

Desire to help patients and professional pride drove professional behavior. “When patients recover and thank us, it feels so fulfilling.” (Informant 4)

#### **Extrinsic Motivation**

Supportive mentors and fair assessments enhanced professional drive. “When mentors appreciate our work, it boosts our spirit to learn and improve.” (Informant 1)

### **Reporting Research Results**

This study identified several key themes related to junior doctors' perceptions of professionalism in clinical practice. Thematic analysis revealed that socialization processes, institutional structure, workload, and motivation all played significant roles in shaping professional behavior.

### Professional Socialization

Participants described transitioning from academic learning to real-world clinical settings as a critical phase in their professional identity formation. One participant stated, *"We learned a lot through direct interactions, such as how to communicate properly with patients and maintain professional ethics"* (Participant 3). A supportive hospital environment, especially the attitudes of mentors, was found to significantly affect the internalization of professional values.

1. Structural Mobility within Clinical Settings

The quality of mentorship and the structure of clinical rotations impacted how junior doctors perceived opportunities for growth. *"When supervisors actively teach and demonstrate good behavior, we develop better"* (Participant 3). Leadership opportunities, such as being trusted to lead night shifts, were seen as signs of vertical professional advancement.

2. Workload and Stress

All participants acknowledged that high workload and long working hours posed challenges to maintaining professionalism. *"Sometimes when I'm too tired and overwhelmed with patients, it affects how I communicate with them"* (Participant 2). Coping strategies included peer support and prioritizing tasks to reduce the impact of fatigue on professional conduct.

3. Motivation and Commitment

Internal motivations such as empathy and a desire to help others were consistent drivers of professional behavior. *"When a patient gets better and thanks us, it's a fulfilling feeling"* (Participant 4). External factors, including positive feedback from supervisors and opportunities for continuing education, reinforced professional attitudes.

### DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the perceptions of junior doctors regarding professionalism in clinical practice at RSUD Drs. H. Amri Tambunan Lubuk Pakam. The findings reaffirm the importance of understanding how early-career medical professionals internalize and apply professional values in dynamic clinical environments.

The study revealed that while most participants demonstrated a conceptual understanding of professionalism, various contextual challenges—such as hierarchical pressures, high workload, and inconsistent mentorship—impacted its practical application. These findings align with previous studies (e.g., Muller & Menges, 2019; Stewart & Harrison, 2021) that emphasize the role of institutional culture and supervision in shaping professional behavior among medical trainees.

Unexpectedly, some participants reported a lack of clarity in the expectations placed upon them, which contributed to hesitancy in clinical decision-making. This may be explained by insufficient orientation or inconsistent feedback mechanisms—a point that contrasts with more structured professional development systems found in larger teaching hospitals.

From a managerial perspective, these findings highlight the need for consistent mentorship programs and targeted professional ethics training within clinical settings. Structured role-modeling and feedback could significantly improve junior doctors' professional growth and patient care outcomes.

The study is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small and focused on a single institution, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Additionally, self-reported data could be subject to bias.

Future research could explore longitudinal changes in professional attitudes from internship to residency or examine cross-cultural differences in professionalism training across medical institutions in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored junior doctors perceptions of professionalism in clinical practice at RSUD Drs. H. Amri Tambunan Lubuk Pakam. The findings highlight that professional values are significantly shaped by clinical exposure, role modeling from senior doctors, institutional structure, and internal motivation. While most participants understood the concept of professionalism, several challenges—such as workload, unclear expectations, and limited mentorship—hampered its consistent application.

The study underscores the need for structured professional development, supportive supervision, and a culture of ethical practice to foster professionalism among junior doctors. These efforts could lead to better quality of care and enhance patient trust.

Future research may examine professional identity formation in other healthcare settings or explore the long-term impact of mentorship and organizational culture on professionalism among medical trainees.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the management and medical staff of RSUD Drs. H. Amri Tambunan Lubuk Pakam for their support and cooperation throughout the research process. Special thanks are extended to the supervising doctors and junior doctors who participated in the interviews and provided valuable insights.

The author is also grateful to academic advisors and lecturers at Universitas Sumatera Utara for their guidance during the completion of this study. Lastly, heartfelt appreciation is given to the author's family for their continuous support and encouragement.

## REFERENCES

- Pratiwi, R., Permana, E., and Suryani, S., 2019. Pengaruh Tingkat Stres terhadap Performa Dokter Muda dalam Pendidikan Klinik di RSUD. *Jurnal Pendidikan Kedokteran Indonesia*, 8(2), pp.45-52.
- Santoso, W. and Mirza, R., 2023. Tantangan dan Pengalaman Dokter Muda dalam Pendidikan Klinik di Masa Pandemi COVID-19. *Jurnal Kesehatan Indonesia*, 14(2), pp.120-130.
- Wibowo, A., Handayani, I. and Raharjo, T., 2020. Kompetensi Klinis dan Kesiapan Dokter Muda dalam Menjalani Praktik Mandiri. *Jurnal Kedokteran Indonesia*, 11(1), pp.37-44.
- Putri, N.L. and Ramadhan, Y., 2022. Efektivitas Program Pendidikan Klinik terhadap Kompetensi Dokter Muda di Rumah Sakit Pendidikan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Profesi Kedokteran*, 12(4), pp.87-93.
- Sari, D.P., and Pranoto, T., 2021. Profesionalitas Dokter Muda dalam Pelayanan Kesehatan di Rumah Sakit Pendidikan. *Jurnal Etika Kedokteran*, 9(3), pp.45-52.
- Andayani, R., and Putra, F., 2022. Profesionalitas dan Etika dalam Pelayanan Kesehatan di Indonesia: Tantangan dan Harapan. *Jurnal Kesehatan Indonesia*, 13(4), pp.87-96.

- Purwanti, M., Armyanti, I., and Asroruddin, M. (2020). Persepsi Mahasiswa Fakultas Kedokteran Universitas Tanjungpura Mengenai Konsep Profesionalisme Dokter. *CDK*, 47(10), 751-756.
- Mason, S. J., and Wright, J. J. (2017). The development of professionalism in medical students: A longitudinal qualitative study. *Medical Education*, 51(12), 1246-1255.
- Susanti, D. and Fathoni, A., 2021. Pengaruh Pengawasan dan Pendampingan terhadap Kemampuan Klinis Dokter Muda. *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat*, 10(3), pp.215-222.
- American Medical Association (AMA). (2020). *AMA Code of Medical Ethics*. American Medical Association.
- Müller, M., and Menges, J. I. (2019). *Social Identity and Professionalism: Exploring the Link between Professional Socialization and Medical Identity Development*. *Medical Education*, 53(10), 1012-1020.
- Dahl, C. L., and Engstrøm, M. (2021). *Development of Professionalism in Medical Education: The Role of Social Learning and Mentorship*. *Medical Teacher*, 43(7), 760-768.
- Ginevra, M. C., and Nota, L. (2020). *Career Adaptability and Development: Psychological and Sociocultural Perspectives*. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 36(3), 276-283.
- Rainey, D. W., and Blanchard, D. A. (2022). *Socialization in Professional Careers: The Impact of Educational and Work Experiences*. *Sociology of Education*, 95(4), 296-314.
- Cohen, S. R., and Mann, L. S. (2022). *Accreditation of Graduate Medical Education: Updating Competency-Based Frameworks*. *Academic Medicine*, 97(3), 385-390.
- Stewart, J., and Harrison, J. (2021). *The role of clinical skills development in the professional identity formation of medical students*. *Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development*, 8, 238212052110381.
- Barker, R., and Edwards, T. (2023). *Ethical Decision Making in Medicine: A Principles-Based Approach*. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 49(1), 38-45.
- Lam, W. W., and Hsiao, A. T. (2023). *Case-based learning for professionalism education: A systematic review*. *Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development*, 10, 238212052311091.
- Richards, M., and Wang, J. (2022). *The role of simulation in teaching professionalism: Insights from medical student feedback*. *BMC Medical Education*, 22(1), 310.
- Nguyen, A. L., and Williams, B. (2023). *Impact of mentorship on professionalism development in medical students: A longitudinal study*. *Academic Medicine*, 98(4), 514-520.
- Martinez, A. L., and Lee, S. (2021). *Promoting mental health and wellbeing in medical students: Integrating wellness into medical curricula*. *Journal of Medical Education and Health Sciences*, 18(3), 144-150.
- Baker, R. (2023). *Clinical Environment and Its Role in Shaping Medical Professionalism*. *Journal of Health Systems Research*, 40(1), 80-92.
- Park, J., and Kim, S. (2022). *Clinical Rotations and Their Effect on Professionalism Development in Medical Students*. *Medical Training Perspectives*, 55(4), 200-213.
- Hernandez, L., and Tan, G. (2020). *Organizational Culture and Its Influence on Medical Professionalism*. *Medical Sociology Journal*, 18(2), 95-107.