

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

11 August 2010

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

McLachlan, J. C. and Finn, G. M. and Sawdon, M. (2010) 'Exploring the relationship between professionalism and conscientiousness.', Association for the Study of Medical Education (ASME) Annual Scientific Meeting 2010 Robinson College, Cambridge, UK, 21-23 Jul 2010.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.asme.org.uk/asmе-annual-scientific-meeting-2010.html>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

### Additional information:

Abstract available below.

## Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

# **The relationship between conscientiousness and professionalism**

John C. McLachlan, Gabrielle Finn and Marina Sawdon

Corresponding Author: John C. McLachlan, School of Medicine and Health, Durham University, Stockton-on-Tees TS17 6BH. [j.c.mclachlan@durham.ac.uk](mailto:j.c.mclachlan@durham.ac.uk)

## **Introduction**

Early concerns about professionalism are a risk factor for later disciplinary proceedings. However, methods of measuring professionalism are subjective, occasional, and expensive, with low reliability and validity. A significant component of professionalism may be conscientiousness in carrying out routine tasks, and this has the potential to be measured in an objective and reliable way.

## **Methods**

We monitored undergraduate medical students' conscientiousness over the course of several academic years to construct a 'Conscientiousness Index'. Items contributing to the Index included completing essential administrative forms, attending compulsory teaching sessions and submitting assignments (unless excused), completion of class evaluations, submission of immunisation status, and so on. One point was awarded when each task was carried out. We compared the resulting Conscientiousness Index (CI) with two separate estimates of professionalism: one arising from staff and one estimated by peers. We also compared the Index with performance on measures of academic performance in a variety of domains.

## **Results**

The CI shows good discrimination and reliability. Statistically significant relationships were observed between the CI and staff and peer concerns about professionalism. Significant correlations were observed between CI scores and assessments of knowledge and skills, but not with existing formal measures of professionalism.

## **Conclusions**

The trait of conscientiousness is a significant component of the construct of professionalism in medical education. Its use is being explored in post graduate settings and other medical and dental schools. Measuring conscientiousness is simple and objective, and represents a significant component of professionalism. Issues may arise with regard to the acceptability of the Index with regard to students and medical professionals.

1. Finn G, Sawdon M, Clipsham L, McLachlan JC (2009) Peer estimates of professionalism correlate with low Conscientiousness Index scores. *Medical Education* **43**: 960-970.

2. McLachlan JC, Finn G, Macnaughton J (2009) The Conscientiousness Index: a novel tool for exploring students' professionalism. *Academic Medicine* 84: 559-565.