Speaker: James L. Bernat, M.D.

Title: Challenges to Ethics and Professionalism Facing the Contemporary Neurologist

Brief Talk Description:
Ethics and professional conduct are not a specialty of medicine but comprise the core of what it means to be a physician: they are intrinsic to our character, identity, and purpose. We are in the midst of a social transformation that threatens our professionalism and the ethical basis of medical practice. I identify the core elements of medical professionalism and principles of medical ethics. I then discuss contemporary challenges to professionalism and ethics by societal trends: the commercialization and commodification of medical practice, conflicts of interest and loyalty, stresses on patient confidentiality, the increasingly onerous regulatory and legalistic payment environment, the harms of electronic health records, the unique issues created by social media, the limits of political action undertaken by medical associations, and the increasing threats to academic health centers, particularly to their teaching, research, and financial stability. These challenges also offer opportunities. I conclude with suggestions to succeed in the current environment.

Biographical Information:
James L. Bernat, M.D. is the Louis and Ruth Frank Professor of Neuroscience and Professor of Neurology and Medicine at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth (formerly Dartmouth Medical School). He graduated from the University of Massachusetts in 1969 and from the Cornell University Medical College in 1973. He trained in internal medicine and neurology at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) from 1973-1977. At DHMC, Dr. Bernat directed the Bioethics Program from 1994-2013 and previously served as an Assistant Dean at Dartmouth Medical School. Dr. Bernat has been elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Omega Alpha, and fellowships in the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Neurology, the American Neurological Association, and The Hastings Center. He is a member of the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives. He has had numerous committee and task force roles in the American Academy of Neurology over the past 35 years. In 2011, he received the American Academy of Neurology Presidential Award. His scholarly interests are in ethical and philosophical issues in neurology, particularly brain death and disorders of consciousness. He has authored over 200 articles and chapters on topics in neurology and clinical ethics. He is the author of Ethical Issues in Neurology, 3rd ed. (Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2008) and coeditor of Palliative Care in Neurology (Oxford University Press, 2004.)