



## CASE STUDY: MOUNT SINAI HEALTH SYSTEM

# From Silos to Structure

## How Mount Sinai Health System Harnessed an Organization-Wide Desire for Excellence to Build a Consistent and Scalable Approach to Professionalism

Mount Sinai Health System (MSHS) is an urban academic medical center in New York City that includes the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, 7 teaching hospitals, approximately 9,000 primary and specialty care physicians, about 2,000 advanced practice providers, more than 400 ambulatory practices, and 48,000 employees. MSHS is an organization focused on aligning all its workforce in the shared pursuit of excellence.

Since becoming a health system over the past decade, MSHS has identified building a united organizational culture as a top priority. Included in this new organizational culture is a strong commitment to professionalism and teamwork, as well as a commitment to creating standardization across the health system.

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*Michael Brodman, MD, Senior Vice President for Professional Excellence, Mount Sinai Health System*

The leadership team recognized the potential benefit of engaging an external partner to help achieve the health system's professionalism goals. MSHS chose to partner with the Vanderbilt Health Center for Patient and Professional Advocacy (CPPA) to design, implement, and sustain a model of professional accountability that encompassed all aspects of education and training. As part of this process, CPPA supported MSHS in their implementation of formal systems for capturing and addressing patient complaints, as well as observations of unprofessional behaviors from coworkers.

“After experiencing CPPA’s data-driven approach and unparalleled expertise during one of their professionalism courses, it was clear that their values aligned with our organization and were the right partner for this work,” said Michael Brodman, MD, Senior Vice President for Professional Excellence, Mount Sinai Health System. “It was all about timing. Were we ready to make the commitment, to draw the line in the sand, and say that unprofessional behavior is no longer acceptable?”

### After a Pandemic Pause, Success Comes Quickly

The partnership began in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the CPPA team was on site when MSHS’s first COVID patient came in for care. The pandemic forced a pause in implementing the program, but once it was fully operational, the results came quickly.

“Shortly after formally launching the program, we received several complaints that required immediate responses,” said Rebecca Anderson, MPH, Vice President, Office of the Chief Medical Officer, Mount Sinai Health System. “We were prepared and equipped to deal with these situations because of our work with CPPA. We were organized, we had a script, we knew who to bring to the table, and we knew how to properly manage each situation in a structured manner. Being able to effectively navigate these scenarios with tools like our huddles was a clear sign to senior leaders that this program provided a valuable structure and immediate value.”

### Professionalism for All Levels, Including Residents and Graduate Students

MSHS chose to include students from the School of Medicine and Graduate School, as well as residents in the professionalism process. These groups were engaged like the rest of the organization and leveraged peer messengers to deliver feedback when professionalism concerns were noted. MSHS felt that it was important to use one model for professionalism (peer messengers) which is different than how other CPPA sites interact with residents, medical students, and graduate students. More typically, they engage leadership for the feedback conversations.

Their unique approach inspired a published [research study in JAMA Network Open](#) to examine if a structured professionalism reporting system could effectively be adopted by trainees at all levels within an academic medical center. The findings of this study confirmed the program successfully identified the small number of individuals associated with unprofessional behaviors toward trainees and increased awareness of the school’s commitment to foster a safe learning environment for all persons.

### Integrating All Data for One Source of Truth

MSHS has multiple reporting avenues for professionalism issues, including three formal portals. Since engaging with CPPA, reports across all the systems are consolidated so MSHS now has the ability to access a single source of information. The health system can still offer multiple avenues for reporting unprofessional behaviors, but now all reports feed into one database for a clear view of what’s happening across the health system. Additionally, the team can now better capture the informal reports that occur across the organization. These include in the moment conversations, emails, and phone calls that were not consistently captured as data previously.

“We are a data-driven organization, so we have greatly valued being able to quantify and benchmark our performance,” said Brijen Shah, MD, AGAF, Vice President of Medical Affairs, Mount Sinai Health System. “It’s been so important for us to gain a more comprehensive view of our own reporting data while also gaining access to CPPA’s national database to compare our results.”



## Secrets to Success at Mount Sinai Health System

### Addressing Egregious Reports

The MSHS team takes reports that may need additional investigation (e.g., sexual boundary violations, violence, discrimination, impairment) very seriously. They are consistently committed to bringing the right stakeholders to the table to address these reports in a timely manner and with proper attention. MSHS has embraced an event huddle for reviewing and triaging these reports and have been leading the conversation nationally about their work in this space, including presentations at national meetings and coauthoring a recent publication describing event huddles, [BMJ Leader](#).

### Responding at Record Rates

One of the key elements of a successful professional accountability program is maintaining fidelity to the intervention model. One of the key performance indicators that CPPA tracks is how often reports that CPPA refers to an organization are shared. At 94%, MSHS has one of the highest share rates of any CPPA site across the country. Virtually every submitted report of unprofessional behavior is addressed.

### Strategically Embracing Change

The team is receptive to feedback and willing to embrace changes to their program as needed. As a result, this has been the foundation of a strategic relationship that allows for innovation and continuous improvement.

### Sustaining the Momentum

MSHS does a great job of keeping the program top of mind across the organization and sustaining the momentum of their professionalism efforts. They have continued to educate their staff and advance the organization's understanding of professionalism and how it fits within their culture and values.

"We have been beyond impressed with CPPA, and we view them as a full-service, strategic partner," said Vicki LoPachin, MD, MBA, Senior Vice President, Chief Medical Officer, Mount Sinai Health System. "In addition to their guidance on improving culture and reducing malpractice risks, they have supported a transition of event reporting systems, consulted with our patient relations department on staffing and processes, collaborated with us on a professionalism dashboard for our chairs and even brokered conversations with our insurer to advance that relationship."