

## Professional Integrity

**B**rigadier General (Ret.) Malham M. Wakin is a permanent professor of the US Air Force Academy and is currently holding the William Lyon Chair in Professional Ethics. In an Internet article, he mentioned a complicated case from the medical profession. As a general practitioner, he has received the results of the blood tests on a 23-year old male patient and he is HIV positive. He is also engaged to be married. He (doctor) points out to him his responsibility to inform his fiancée because she has a right to know about the danger to her and to any future children they might have. The patient reacts very emotionally to doctor's suggestion because he believes she will refuse to marry him if she learns he has the AIDS virus. He says to the doctor, "you must keep my condition a secret from her and from everyone. You're bound by the principle of patient confidentiality." What should the doctor say in reply? Upon reflection, the doctor replies, "I can't do that."

Aristotle pointed out that moral credit is not automatic when right actions are done nor is it enough to know what is right or to say what is right. He suggested that we are morally praiseworthy when we do a right action if we, first of all, know that the action is right, secondly, choose the act for its own sake because we know it is right, and thirdly, do the action from a firm and unchangeable character—from the habit of doing, that kind of action consistently. For Aristotle, it was very important that we develop the moral virtues through habit and practice, doing right actions so that they become part of our identity—our character. Integrity is the modern name we use to describe the actions of those persons who consistently act from a firmly established character pattern, doing the right thing. We especially stress the concepts of integrity when there is temptation to diverge from what good character demands. Persons of integrity do not stray from acting in accordance with strong moral principle even when it is expedient or personally advantageous to do so. Persons of integrity act like the ideal persons they are trying to be. This is perhaps what the ancient Taoist has in mind when he says, "The way to do, is to be." Thus the wholeness of the good person, the total identity, is what we mean when we refer to his or her integrity. When we say, "don't sacrifice your integrity," we really mean, "don't stop being who you ought to be."

We, CMAs, as the member of our beloved profession, and then "who we ought to be" must also involve our social role as practicing professionals. Our professional integrity will include the role specific obligations and responsibilities of our profession. We must stress here the social character of professional integrity because the community is involved at every stage of our professional development. □