

NAVIGATING MEDICAL STAFF PROFESSIONALISM AND PERFORMANCE CONCERNS

A COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP APPROACH



A practitioner's inappropriate words, actions, or inactions may interfere with functioning well with others and may impact quality health care delivery.

Addressing concerns requires a compassionate leadership approach, including awareness, education, and supportive interventions.

By understanding the causes, medical leaders can work with a practitioner towards a supportive resolution thereby fostering a healthier workplace culture.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

PATIENT AND PERSON-CENTRIC APPROACH:

- Unprofessional behavior can unintentionally impact patient care quality.
- Employing empathy and compassion can reduce psychological stress, identify underlying causes, and enhance positive outcomes.

PREVENTION AND NORMALIZATION:

- Educate and model acceptable behavior.
- Normalize identification, reporting, and resolution process.

REMEDICATION FOCUS:

- Emphasize remediation over punishment.
- Goal: Keep skilled practitioners working while addressing behavior.

INTERNAL FACTORS

- Lack of self-awareness or emotional intelligence
- Failing to establish or maintain clear boundaries
- Experiencing burnout
- Unhealthy conflict resolution strategies
- Substance abuse
- Poor social skills
- Psychiatric distress

EXTERNAL FACTORS

- High workloads, long hours, challenging patient cases
- Dysfunctional work environments, strained relationships
- Inadequate support systems
- Health care hierarchy, power struggles
- Adverse events
- Litigation

INVESTIGATING THE ISSUE

Validity Check and Initial Assessment:

- Verify validity of each reported incident promptly upon receipt.
- Consider whether a reasonable person would find the behavior inappropriate.
- If behavior breaches facility's code of conduct, further steps are warranted.

Communication with Reporter and Informal Resolution:

- Engage with reporter to discuss concerns and attempt resolution.
- Advise practitioner of complaint, encourage response.

Resolution at Early Stage:

- Substantiate objective facts by interviewing witnesses and reviewing relevant records.
- If identified behavior is minor, consider resolving it now.

Additional Data Collection:

- If early stage resolution not possible, depending on severity, collect data from academic records and practitioner's files (helps to establish or rule out patterns of problematic conduct).

Unsubstantiated Information in Files:

- Information in files lacking witness interviews or other evidence is insufficient for decision-making.
- Should undergo the same review process as the reported incident to ensure fairness and allow practitioner to respond.
- Clarify with practitioner that complaint will not have further consequences.
- Retain a note in personnel file.

No Substantiation of Complaint:

- If witness statements and other information do not substantiate complaint, no further action necessary.
- Ensure respectful communication with reporter to address their concerns.
- Clarify with practitioner that complaint will not have further consequences.
- Retain a note in personnel file.

Substantiated Complaint:

- **Further steps are required**
- **Process need not be formal or punitive; response should consider nature and severity of behavior.**

CONFIDENTIALITY

Identity of reporter is considered confidential. Reporter may choose to release personal information:

- to assist with investigation.
- to enable professional organization/governing body to carry out investigation.
- to allow interviews to obtain additional information.
- to comply with appeals or processes that require disclosure of information.



SOURCES OF CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS

- Patients
- Families
- Facility staff
- Management
- Other medical staff



WHERE TO DIRECT COMPLAINTS

- Medical staff - to direct supervisor
 - Medical leader - to supervisor or VP Medicine
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STAGED SUPPORTIVE APPROACH

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Early Resolution (prior to formalized complaint): For Minor Infractions or Behavioural Concerns

- Encourage direct and respectful communication for minor concerns.
- Aim for informal resolution to maintain positive working environment (in person, virtual, or phone; 'coffee conversation').
- Coach compassionate conversations for all involved.
- Document incident but do not attach to personnel file. Summary of discussion sent to member (eg email).

STAGE 1

Incidents That Involve Objectionable Conduct of Low Severity

Unprofessional conduct not resolved informally or when part of a recurring pattern. Requires a written complaint from an identified individual. Stage 1 completed within 4 weeks of reported incident.

Purpose: Address first-time, low-severity unprofessional conduct.

Process: Formal meeting with practitioner to discuss issue and potential resolutions.

- Describe behavior, its impact and expected standards of behavior/performance.
- Provide opportunity for response.
- Provide guidance to access counselling or other personal support - eg. Physician Health Program 24-Hour Help Line 1-800-663-6729.
- Suggest clinical, educational, or other supportive learning to achieve change.
- Collaborate with practitioner to formulate a resolution.

Documentation: Document discussion and store in personnel file.



Stage 2

Repeated Minor Infractions Despite Stage 1 Intervention, or Infractions of Moderate Severity

Stage 2 completed within 4 weeks of receiving complaint.

Purpose: Address moderate severity conduct or repeated low severity conduct after an ineffective Stage 1 intervention.

Process: Similar to Stage 1, but with added emphasis on pattern of behavior and a formal behavioral/remediation agreement.

- Details and implications of complaint clearly outlined.
- Provide opportunity for response.
- Practitioner notified second formal stage of disciplinary process reached.
- Invite practitioner to bring a supportive colleague or legal counsel to join meeting.
- Arrange clinical, educational, or other supportive learning as applicable.
- Collaborate with practitioner to formulate a resolution.
- Clearly document expected behaviour and/or remediation in a written agreement.

Documentation: Share detailed documentation including taken by an objective third party in a letter, stored in personnel file.



Stage 3

Persistent Objectionable Conduct

Stage 3 completed within 4 weeks of receiving complaint.

Purpose: Address persistent unprofessional behavior or serious clinical concerns.

- **Process:** High-level assessment and recommendation for disciplinary action involving practitioner's direct supervisor (appropriate medical leader), Executive Medical Director, and VP Medicine.
- Details and implications of complaint clearly outlined.
- Provide opportunity for response.
- Practitioner notified third formal stage of disciplinary process reached.
- Encouraged to bring professional support to meeting.
- Compassionate approach with goal of collaborating with practitioner to formulate a resolution, which may require restriction of privileges or a report to the College.
- Written and signed agreement developed including method of redress and monitoring progress, description of behavior benchmarks, time frame for demonstrable change, and consequences of non-compliance. May require psychological or mental health support.
- Provide guidance for accessing professional support - eg. Physician Health Program 24-Hour Help Line 1-800-663-6729), and insist on official follow up.

Documentation: Schedule follow up review at regular intervals for as long as required to reach resolution, and report progress in their personnel file.

Crisis Intervention

VP Medicine immediately notified.

Purpose: Immediate action for egregious behavior or clinical concerns to prevent harm.

- Abandonment of a patient
- Significant violations of respectful workplace policy.
- Criminal offense related to privileges.
- Impairment including but not limited to drugs or alcohol.

Process: Possible summary restriction or suspension of privileges.

Documentation: Summary of actions taken stored in personnel file.

NAVIGATING THE CONVERSATION

Agree on Purpose: Start with a clear, future-focused, positive purpose that benefits everyone.

1. **Effective Communication:**
 - Allow only one person to speak at a time.
 - Maintain a respectful tone and low voice volume.
 - Ensure equal opportunities for everyone to express themselves.
2. **Curiosity and Open-Mindedness:**
 - Approach discussions with a learner's mindset.
 - Avoid judgment and explore alternative options.
3. **Active Listening:**
 - Understand other perspectives, assumptions, needs, and ideas.
 - Refrain from interrupting or reacting negatively.
4. **Thoughtful Responses:**
 - Take time to think before replying.
5. **Compassion and Respect:**
 - Practice empathy, kindness, and respect.
6. **Avoid Reacting Personally:**
 - Focus on the situation or issue, not the person.
 - Refrain from blame or attacks.
7. **Use "I" Statements:**
 - Express feelings without accusing others.
8. **Identify Core Needs:**
 - Recognize what's important to all parties involved.
9. **Agree on a Plan:**
 - Commit to a way forward.
 - Create an action plan.
10. **Seek Support:**
 - Discuss necessary resources for progress.