

Dealing with Difficult Patients
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Disclosures

- None

What is difficult behavior?

Non Compliance

- Won't take medication
- No shows for appointment
- Poor cooperation in office while checking in or during workup
- Showing up late for work or taking longer/more frequent breaks
- Not performing the jobs duties

Hostility

- Raising voice
- Threatening
- Belittling
- Facial expressions
- Pointing fingers
- Physical aggression

Passive Aggressiveness

- Silence
- Sarcasm
- Backhanded compliments
- Causing small problems elsewhere (intentional mistakes)
- Procrastination

Difficult Interactions in a Clinic Setting

Crucial Conversations

- When opinions differ
- When stakes are high
- When emotions are high

Factors that contribute to difficult interactions in a clinic setting

- Patient factors
- Physician/staff factors
- Situational factors

<https://www.clinchero.net/abstract/2013-dealing-with-difficult-patients>

What causes difficult behavior?

- Influenced by the person and people in the situation
 - Maturity, age, past experience, relationships
- Patients may be angry about a certain interaction
- They may also be fearful of dealing with change
 - Outside influences in their life

Patient characteristics

- Prevalence of difficult patients estimated at 15%
 - Angry
 - Defensive
 - Afraid
 - Resistant
 - Grieving
 - Demanding
 - Needy
 - Seductive/flirty manner

Physician/Staff characteristics

- Fatigued
- Angry
- Defensive
- Arrogant



Situational factors

- Language/literacy issues
- Companions during consult
- Breaking bad news
- Wait times
- Poor clinical outcomes

Personal Power

- You don't always have the ability to control the situation, but you always have the ability to control how you react to the situation.
 - First work on you

How do we deal with these difficult situations?

When faced with pressure and strong opinions, we often stop worrying about the goal of adding to the pool of meaning and start looking for ways to win, punish, or keep peace

AVOID!

- Most of us do not like confrontation
- Avidly avoid the situations altogether
 - Make us feel uncomfortable
 - Forces us to be open
 - Feelings can be hurt or get hurt
 - Could possibly worsen the situation
- Not usually an option, however by controlling situations early it can avoid the confrontation becoming larger than needed

What Not To Do

- Punish!
 - Wanting to win the point and harm the other person
- Ignore the problem
- Accuse the patient or co-worker of being problematic
- Minimize or deny their concerns

Put it in writing

- If its not documented it didn't happen
- In all situations, it is important to document any altercation or possible situations that may lead to further action
 - Staff as part of their HR record of behavior
 - Patients in case of litigation or the need to dismiss a patient

What should you do?

When on the Phone

- Smile, it can be heard through the phone
- Let them speak
- Tonality and verbiage can be used to calm the patient
- Be aware what we project through our own voice over the phone to the patients

In the Heat of the Moment..

- When in the moment of a crucial conversation remember:
 - Start with HEART
 - Hear them out
 - Emphathize
 - Acknowledge
 - Respond appropriately
 - Take responsibility and thank the patient

- Again you can only control yourself and your actions
 - Focus on what you really want from the encounter
 - What do I want for myself? For others? For the relationship?
 - How would I behave if this were what I really wanted?

Refuse the Fools Choice

- It is not an either or decision
 - Winning or losing
 - Always another option
 - Clarify what you want from the situation and think about how to make that happen

- Stay in dialogue
- Make it safe
 - Don't resort to threats or name calling
- Don't let emotion lead the conversation
- Agree on mutual purpose
- Separate facts from story
- Agree on a clear action plan

7 Tips

TIP 1: Stay Calm

- Allows you to stay in control
- Allows opportunity to defuse the situation



<https://www.jacksonfile.com/blog/turning-official-patients/>

It's not about you...

- Don't take it personally
- May be having a bad day
- May be in pain
- May be worried
- May be frustrated with the situation
 - Wait times
 - Poor clinical outcomes



TIP 2: Engage in Conversation

- Active listening
 - Often patients just want to be heard
- Maintain eye contact
- Speak softly
- Avoid negative language



<https://www.jacksonville.com/blog/nursing/difficult-patients/>

Active listening

- Pay attention
- Show that you're listening
- Provide feedback
- Don't interrupt
- Respond appropriately

TIP 3: Be Empathetic

- Be respectful
- Show that you care
- Show that they are important

TIP 4: Avoid Arguing

- Better to apologize
- Reassure the patient you personally will take care of it
- FOLLOW THROUGH! This will help build your co-workers and patients trust and avoid these situations in the future

TIP 5: Set Boundaries

- Know when it is better to step away from the situation and get help

TIP 6: Learn to Prioritize

- Another patient in greater need should not be neglected due to pressure from a difficult patient who doesn't require immediate care

TIP 7: Shake it Off

- Don't let it cloud your day
- Step away for a minute
- Take several deep breaths and a moment for yourself to re-center
- It is better to take the time then and allow yourself to refuel your ability to deal with stress
 - Will result in better interactions throughout the day
 - Less frustration

Take Care of Ourselves

“Actions have consequences..first rule of life. And the second rule is this: You are the only one responsible for your own actions.”
-Holly Lisle

- Watch your well being
- Make sure you are well rested
- Remember to eat
- Know your trigger issues
- Know your limits

Healthy Power

- Personal Responsibility
- Optimistic Expectations
- Win-Win Relationships
- Energizing Joy
- Reality-Based Choices
- Focused Action
- Unrelenting Courage
- Lifelong Purpose

Further Reading

- Healthy Power by Craig Pizo
- Crucial Conversations by Patterso, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler

Build Up Your Reserve!

- Personal reserve of power and ability to deal with the day
- Take the time to restore this
 - How do you destress?
 - How do you restore this throughout the day?
 - How do you help others restore theirs?

10 Ways to Build Resilience

1. Make connections
2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems
3. Accept that change is a part of living
4. Move toward your goals
5. Take decisive actions
6. Look for opportunities for self discovery
7. Nurture a positive self image
8. Keep things in perspective
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook
10. Practice good self care

“Be a first rate version of yourself, not a second rate version of someone else.”
-Judy Garland

Questions?

Thank you!

