



Huddle Up

Professionalism in the Dialysis Setting - Series #3

Guidelines for Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

There are several boundary problems that can indicate that staff's behavior is no longer within a zone of helpfulness and can be detrimental to the patient-provider relationship. These include:

1 Over Self-disclosure

- Sharing personal information about yourself should be rare and should only be done if it is to benefit the patient's care in some way.
- If you are feeling emotional about something that you are sharing, then it is probably too personal and not in the best interest of the patient.
- When staff discuss personal issues it often adds anxiety and worry for the patient.
- Over self-disclosure can lead to the belief that there is a special relationship and the patient may have expectations that can lead to conflict and put the patient at risk of psychological harm.

2 Developing Friendships with Patients

- Keep relationships with patients on a strictly professional basis. These relationships do not require a mutual give and take which is common in healthy friendships.
- Avoid spending time with patients outside the clinic. Do not plan "off duty" activities.
- Do not "friend" a patient on social media. Social media can blur the boundaries between staff's personal and professional lives.
- If you can, avoid having dual relationships where you know the patients from a setting outside of dialysis like school or church.

3 Special Treatment

- Avoid "super staff" syndrome, feeling that you are the only one who understands the patient and are obliged to solve the patient's problems (sometimes more than the patient does).
- Avoid spending disproportionate amount of time with one patient or trading assignments to care for a patient.

Boundaries and Violations

To maintain professional boundaries, staff must balance their level of involvement. Staff must ensure that they are not under involved in the patient's care (ie. ignoring health information or keeping information from patients) and that they are not over involved (ie. engaging with patients outside of dialysis, giving patients money or special treatment).

Staff need to be aware of their own behavior and communicate the importance of boundaries when a patient challenges them. If staff are uncertain about a situation, they should seek guidance from the clinic manager, social worker and/or risk management.

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