



Huddle Up

Professionalism in the Dialysis Setting - Series #2

Outpatient dialysis facilities are unique healthcare settings. They serve patients living with a chronic disease multiple days a week for several hours, often for many years and frequently provided by the same staff. The environment can pose a challenge for staff to set and keep proper boundaries within the patient-provider relationship. When appropriate limits are set, the relationship can be very positive for patients. However, poor boundaries can contribute to patient dissatisfaction and/or disruptive behavior in the dialysis facility.

Professionalism Boundaries

Merriam-Webster defines a boundary as “something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent”. Professional boundaries define the effective and proper interaction between staff and the patients they serve.

Boundaries are guidelines for professional behavior, they are patient centered and are comfortable for both patients and staff. Maintaining boundaries is the responsibility of the professional as they should not overstep the invisible lines drawn to protect patients.

The dialysis patient-provider relationship has an inherent power imbalance as patients need dialysis care to continue living. Thus, patients are vulnerable and dependent on the goodwill and motivations of those caring for them, trusting staff to keep them alive. Maintaining appropriate boundaries helps to build patient trust and confidence in staff.

Guidelines for Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

The best interactions:

- are goal-directed. The patient’s long-term goals and plans are the primary goal for their care and the relationship.
- have the patient’s best interest at the center.
- promote self-care and independence.
- are consistent across all patients.
- are respectful. Mutual respect is key. Most disruptive situations in dialysis are caused by someone feeling disrespected (purposeful or unintentional).

Conversations between staff and patients should be related to patient needs and not staff needs.

- It is ok for staff to share “surface” information with patients (things you may tell a stranger or acquaintance like marital status, kids, hobbies).
- Never tell patients about issues with your employer or other employees, your personal relationship problems, or private details of your life. This can cause patients to lose trust and confidence in those providing their care.

Think before you act. Every good deed performed outside the professional realm has negative consequences that always outweigh the benefits.

- Interaction should be during on-duty time only. Attendance at events outside of dialysis should be examined closely.
- No financial involvement.
- Do not do a favor for one patient that is not extended to all your patients.

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