

Unprofessional Behavior Within the Healthcare Team

The North Carolina Medical Board (“the Board”) recognizes that the manner in which its licensees interact with others can significantly impact patient care.

The Board strongly urges its licensees to fulfill their obligations to maximize the safety of patient care by behaving in a manner that promotes both professional practice and a work environment that ensures high standards of care. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education highlights the importance of interpersonal/communication skills and professionalism as two of the six core competencies required for graduation from residency. Licensees should consider it their ethical duty to foster respect among all health care professionals as a means of ensuring good patient care.

Disruptive behavior is a style of interaction with physicians, hospital personnel, patients, family members, or others that interferes with patient care. Behaviors such as rude, loud, or offensive comments; sexual harassment or other inappropriate physical contact; and intimidation of staff, patients, and family members are commonly recognized as detrimental to patient care. Furthermore, it has become apparent that disruptive behavior is often a marker for concerns that can range from a lack of interpersonal skills to deeper problems, such as depression or substance use disorder. As a result, disruptive behavior may constitute grounds for further inquiry by the Board into the potential underlying causes of such behavior. Behavior by a licensee that is disruptive may also constitute grounds for Board discipline.

The Board distinguishes disruptive behavior from constructive criticism that is offered in a professional manner with the aim of improving patient care. The Board also reminds its licensees of their responsibility not only to patients, but also to themselves. Symptoms of stress or work-related burnout, such as exhaustion, cynicism, or depression, can negatively affect a licensee’s health and performance. Licensees suffering such symptoms are encouraged to seek the support needed to help them regain their equilibrium.

Finally, licensees, in their role as patient and peer advocates, are obligated to take appropriate action when observing disruptive behavior on the part of other licensees. The Board urges its licensees to support their hospital, practice, or other healthcare organization in their efforts to identify and manage disruptive behavior, by taking a role in the process of addressing behavior when appropriate.