



IT'S NOT OKAY

ADDRESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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Healthcare's Worst Kept Secret

A 2018 Medscape study surveyed 6235 healthcare providers and found that patients sexually harassed **27% of physicians**, whereas only **7%** were sexually harassed by clinicians, medical personnel, or administrators.

Source: <https://www.medscape.com/slideshow/sexual-harassment-of-physicians-6010304>

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Healthcare's Worst Kept Secret

In 1993, researchers in the New England Journal of Medicine reported that up to 75% of female doctors were harassed by patients.

Source: https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJM199308263290914?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%3Dwww.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

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Healthcare's Worst Kept Secret

A 2023 JAMA Internal Medicine study found that only **12.8%** self-reported sexual harassment. Of those that self-reported, **24.8%** of women compared to **3.2%** of men.

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9857703/>

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The Rise of Sexual Harassment Claims

In 2017, sexual harassment claims dominated news coverage and social media forums. Claims of sexual misconduct and harassment have certainly clouded — if not ended — the careers of once powerful and publicly respected celebrities, and the #MeToo movement has encouraged and empowered many ordinary people to come forward with their stories of being harassed and treated inappropriately. The healthcare field is not immune to claims of sexual harassment.



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Sexual Victimization by Women

In 2014, a study was published on the sexual victimization of men, finding that men were much more likely to be the victims of sexual abuse.



The common one-dimensional stereotype of women as victims reinforces outdated gender stereotypes. The assumption that men are always perpetrators and never victims reinforces unhealthy ideas about men.

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50%

of harassment incidents in healthcare were initiated by patients and their families.



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Tom's Story



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How are you protecting your team?



Healthcare organizations are responsible for the protection of their employees. Practice owners must understand sexual harassment by non-employees is a serious allegation and protecting their employees from this harassment is of the utmost importance.

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Patient Harassment

Forms of Harassment Reported:


- Acted in an overtly sexual manner
- Asked you on a date
- Tried to touch, grope, or rub against you
- Asked you for a sexual encounter
- Sent you sexual emails, letters, or gave provocative photos
- Accused you of making a pass or asking for sexual activity

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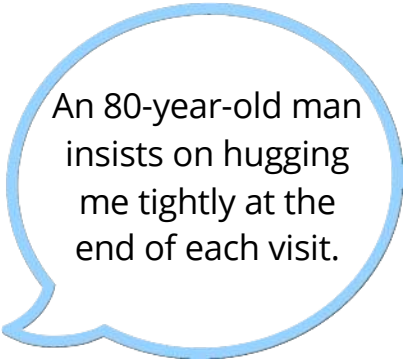
Female Healthcare Providers Describe Harassment from Patients



A patient commented that he would grab my breast if I caused him pain.




Patients frequently comment on how pretty I am and ask me out on dates.



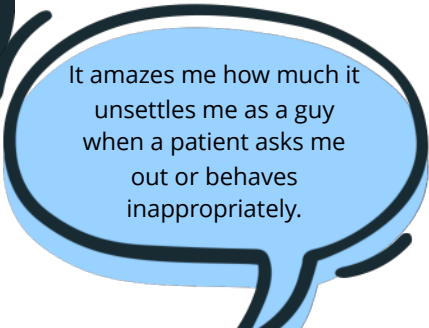
An 80-year-old man insists on hugging me tightly at the end of each visit.

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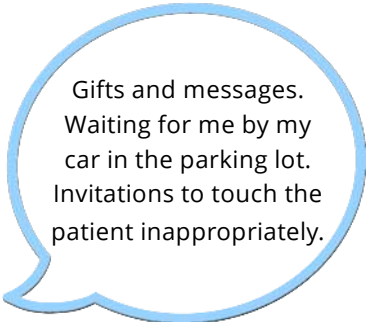
Male Healthcare Providers Describe Harassment from Patients



The patient took off her shirt without being instructed to do so. I told her it was inappropriate and had a female employee come in the room with me.



It amazes me how much it unsettles me as a guy when a patient asks me out or behaves inappropriately.



Gifts and messages. Waiting for me by my car in the parking lot. Invitations to touch the patient inappropriately.

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Improving Policies in Practice

Every healthcare organization needs to promote a clear, comprehensive policy that conveys a firm commitment to safety, respect, inclusion, and equality. It should contain guidelines for:

- Policy Statement
- Prohibited behavior
- Employee reporting of sexual harassment
- Practice responses to offensive or abusive behavior, discrimination, and retaliation
- Consequences for violating the policy

In addition, secure methods of reporting harassment should be readily available to employees.



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Patient Conduct Policy

[Practice Name] is committed to providing patients, visitors, and staff with a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment. This Patient Conduct Policy outlines our expectations for patient behavior and the consequences of harassment or inappropriate conduct towards healthcare professionals and staff.

Expectations for Patient Conduct:

1. **Respectful Behavior:** Patients are expected to treat all healthcare professionals, staff members, and fellow patients with courtesy, dignity, and respect.
2. **Non-Discrimination:** Discrimination, harassment, or derogatory remarks based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other characteristics will not be tolerated.
3. **Professional Boundaries:** Patients must recognize and respect the professional boundaries of healthcare providers and staff. Any behavior that violates these boundaries, including sexual advances, inappropriate comments, or gestures, is strictly prohibited.
4. **Compliance with Instructions:** Patients must follow the instructions and guidelines provided by healthcare professionals and staff regarding their treatment, medication, and conduct within the facility.
5. **Safety and Security:** Patients must refrain from engaging in any behavior that compromises their safety or security, that of themselves, other patients, visitors, or staff members.
6. **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Patients are expected to respect the privacy and confidentiality of other patients and healthcare professionals. Any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is prohibited.

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Patient Conduct Policy

Consequences of Violating Patient Conduct Policy:

- 1.Warning: In cases of minor misconduct or first-time offenses, patients may receive a verbal or written warning from healthcare staff.
- 2.Restriction of Services: For repeated violations or more serious misconduct, [Healthcare Facility Name] reserves the right to restrict a patient's access to certain services or facilities within the healthcare facility.
- 3.Discharge: Patients who engage in severe or persistent misconduct, including but not limited to physical violence, threats, or sexual harassment, may be discharged from the healthcare facility. The facility's management will make discharge decisions with appropriate healthcare professionals.
- 4.Legal Action: In cases involving criminal behavior or serious threats to the safety of staff or other patients, [Healthcare Facility Name] may involve law enforcement authorities and pursue legal action as necessary.

Communication and Implementation: This Patient Conduct Policy will be communicated to all patients upon admission to the healthcare facility through written materials, signage, and verbal communication by staff members. Patients must acknowledge their understanding and agreement to comply with the policy.

[Practice Name] is committed to enforcing this policy consistently and fairly to maintain a safe and respectful environment for all individuals within our facilities.

Date of Implementation: [Insert Date]

Review Date: [Insert Review Date]

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Reporting Procedure for Sexual Harassment from Patients

[Practice Name] is committed to providing all employees with a safe and respectful workplace environment. Sexual harassment, including harassment from patients, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This policy outlines the procedure for employees to report incidents of sexual harassment from patients and the steps that will be taken to address such reports.

Reporting Procedure:

- 1.Immediate Response: If an employee experiences sexual harassment from a patient, they should immediately remove themselves from the situation and seek support from a colleague or supervisor.
- 2.Documentation: The employee should document the incident as soon as possible, including details such as the date, time, location, description of the harassment, and any witnesses present.
- 3.Report to Supervisor: Employees should report the incident to their immediate supervisor or manager. If the supervisor is not available or involved in the incident, the report should be made to the next level of management or to the human resources department.
- 4.Confidentiality: Reports of sexual harassment will be handled with the utmost confidentiality to protect the privacy and well-being of the employee. Just so you know, information will only be shared with individuals directly involved in the investigation process on a need-to-know basis.
- 5.Investigation: Upon receiving a report of sexual harassment from a patient, [Healthcare Facility Name] will conduct a prompt and thorough investigation. This may involve interviewing the employee who experienced harassment, gathering witness statements, and reviewing evidence.
- 6.Support for the Employee: [Healthcare Facility Name] will provide support and resources to employees who have experienced sexual harassment, including access to counseling services and assistance in navigating the reporting and investigation process.
- 7.Consequences for the Patient: If the investigation confirms that sexual harassment occurred, appropriate action will be taken against the patient, which may include restricting their access to certain services or facilities within the healthcare facility.
- 8.Follow-Up: [Healthcare Facility Name] will follow up with the employee who made the report to ensure that they feel supported and that appropriate action has been taken to address the harassment.
- 9.Non-Retaliation: [Healthcare Facility Name] prohibits retaliation against any employee who reports sexual harassment in good faith. Any acts of retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action.

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Reporting Procedure for Sexual Harassment from Patients

[Communication and Awareness:

This reporting procedure will be communicated to all employees through written materials, staff training sessions, and inclusion in the employee handbook. Employees will be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the procedure and report any incidents of sexual harassment promptly.

[Practice Name] is committed to fostering a culture of respect and dignity in the workplace and encourages all employees to speak up against harassment of any kind.

Date of Implementation: [Insert Date]

Review Date: [Insert Review Date]

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Handling Sexual Harassment

The provider/CA must first ask the harassing patient to stop before attempting to proceed with care. If the patient doesn't stop or you still feel uncomfortable, possible steps include:

- Exiting the room and asking for help from another healthcare professional
- Transferring care to another physician with explicit warnings about the patient's behavior



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Steps for Reporting

Document incident

Report the incident to your malpractice insurance carrier

Address incident with patient

Dismiss the patient and/or contact law enforcement.



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Reporting Harassment


Practice team members must be aware of the issue; they cannot act on what they do not know. Anytime a member of the team experiences sexual harassment from a patient or their loved ones, it's critical that you are notified right away.

1. Use the words of the person
2. Describe the action if applicable
3. Name witnesses



The practice owner's responsible for investigating and following the steps outlined in the organization's policies and procedures. Based on the information gathered, an action plan should be developed and followed. This action plan may include the following:

1. Discussing the complaint with the suspected perpetrator
2. Developing a behavioral contract
3. Removing the visitor or family member from the practice

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Unintentional Harassment



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Is Your Behavior Appropriate?



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That's Awkward



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How would you handle this situation?



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Our Team



+888-719-9990



info@chirohealthusa.com



www.chirohealthusa.com



1307 Airport Road N, Suite 1A, Flowood, MS 39232



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