

### 4.34 Boundary Violations

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#### Standard

The physiotherapist acts with integrity and maintains appropriate professional **boundaries** with clients, colleagues, students and others.

#### Expected outcome

Clients can expect to be treated with dignity and respect, and that the physiotherapist will maintain boundaries appropriate to the **therapeutic relationship** in all interactions.

Colleagues, students and others can expect to be treated with dignity and respect and that the physiotherapist will maintain professional boundaries in all interactions.

#### Performance expectations

In regard to therapeutic relationships with clients, the physiotherapist must:

- Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the impact of power, trust, respect, and physical closeness on relationships with clients.
- Treat clients with respect avoiding all situations, comments and/or actions that could reasonably be perceived as:
  - o Unprofessional
  - o In violation of human rights
  - o Discriminatory
- Not enter into or continue therapeutic relationships with individuals with whom professional boundaries, judgment and objectivity cannot be established and maintained.
- Not make abusive, sexually suggestive or harassing comments or engage in inappropriate physical contact with clients.

- Establish and maintain a professional physical environment that supports the maintenance of therapeutic boundaries during client assessment, treatment, and education in both formal and informal practice environments. Including but not limited to:
  - Proactively provide options for draping.
  - Provide **privacy** while the client is undressing or dressing.
  - Ensure the patient is appropriately draped throughout the interaction.
- Explain to clients beforehand any procedures that could be misinterpreted and obtain ongoing informed consent.
- Not attempt to persuade clients to a personal view related to politics or religion in the context of a therapeutic relationship.
- Not enter a **close personal relationship** with a client or a person who is a caregiver for a client (e.g., parent of a minor receiving physiotherapy services, client's spouse).
- Not use their professional role as a means of pursuing personal relationships beyond the therapeutic relationship with clients and former clients.
- Identify, document, and address boundary violations, whether initiated by the physiotherapist or the client, by discussing inappropriate behaviour and attempting to resolve issues.
- End the therapeutic relationship by appropriately discontinuing treatment or transferring care as required in instances where:
  - The physiotherapist is unable to maintain their objectivity,
  - Professional boundaries cannot be maintained or re-established,
  - A positive, respectful therapeutic relationship cannot be established.

In regard to relationships with colleagues and students whom the physiotherapist supervises or has authority over, the physiotherapist must:

- Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the impact of power, trust, respect, and physical closeness on relationships with colleagues, students, and others.
- Conduct oneself professionally in the work environment, treating colleagues, students and others with respect avoiding all situations, comments and/or actions that could reasonably be perceived as:
  - Unprofessional,
  - In violation of human rights,

o Discriminatory

- Establish and maintains professional boundaries with students.
- Not engage in sexual advances, sexual relationships or inappropriate physical contact with students or supervisees

## Receiving Gifts

In regard to accepting gifts from patients, the physiotherapist must assess the risk and implications of accepting gifts from patients and have strategies to address gift giving by patients to avoid misunderstandings.

The physiotherapist should assess:

- o Motivation of the patient to give a gift.
- o How accepting the gift impacts their ability to be objective, unbiased in clinical decisions
- o Could it be reasonably perceived that accepting the gift would be inappropriate/unethical

## Definitions

**Boundaries** refers to the accepted social, physical or psychological space between people. Boundaries create an appropriate therapeutic or professional distance between the physiotherapist and another individual and clarify their respective roles and expectations.

**Close personal relationship** is one where the physiotherapist's ability to be objective and impartial, and to fulfill their professional obligations may be impaired due to the nature of the personal relationship. Close personal relationships typically exist between an individual and their romantic or sexual partner, children, parents, and close friends, but may also exist between individuals and other relatives, business partners, past romantic partners and others.

**Privacy** refers to "a person's desire to control the access of others to themselves. Privacy protects access to the person, whereas confidentiality protects access to the data."

**Therapeutic Relationship** refers to the relationship that exists between a physiotherapist and a client during the course of physiotherapy treatment. The relationship is based on trust, respect, and the expectation that the physiotherapist will establish and maintain the relationship according to applicable legislation and regulatory