



Dealing with Difficult Patients

By Christopher Peine, DO, Idaho Board of Medicine

Despite our best efforts as health care providers, encounters with difficult patients are a part of most any medical practice. At some point in our career each of us will encounter a patient or relative of a patient who is manipulative, self-destructive, noncompliant, or even overtly hostile. At minimum, such encounters are often frustrating for both the physician and the patient. If the frustration or grievance is great enough, the patient may file a formal complaint with the Board of Medicine, leading to a formal investigation. This article will briefly review a few simple measures to prevent difficult encounters and provide a few techniques for managing an escalating difficult interaction.

When it comes to interactions with difficult patients, prevention is often the best approach. So what can be done to avoid difficult interactions?

First, acknowledge and address underlying mental health issues in your patient early in the relationship.

Also, be aware that the greatest source of discontent for patients is feeling as if they don't matter, or if their complaint has not been heard.

Frequently, this feeling arises from the workload and time constraints we face in a busy practice. Making changes in the office schedule and workflow to maximize efficiency and allow more face-to-face time makes for a less stressful and more satisfying physician-patient relationship while decreasing the likelihood a patient will feel as if they have not been heard. Also, consider your body language while in the room with the patient: are you sitting with the patient and looking at them while they are providing their history, or are you sitting with your back turned while typing into your electronic chart? Finally, being self aware of your own emotional state is often your earliest clue of a potential conflict. What is your own stress level? Are you facing burnout or exhaustion? If you experiencing resentment, frustration, fear, or anxiety during a patient encounter, beware that your capacity to manage an emotionally charged situation is compromised.

Consider self-care or even professional help if negative emotions and excessive stress are a routine experience in your clinical practice, for they are likely affecting your ability to care for others.

So what can be done to de-escalate a tense encounter with a disgruntled or hostile patient? First and foremost, remain professional. An encounter with a hostile patient or family member can quickly escalate if you feed into it with a poor attitude and unprofessional behavior. If you feel your own emotions boiling over, simply excuse yourself from the room and take a few deep breaths. While you are cooling down, ask yourself what the patient is really asking. Put yourself in their shoes. Anger is most often an outward expression of fear, and recognizing this can help restore your sense of compassion. Also, remember that negative emotions directed at you are often misplaced, and originate in past negative experiences with other doctors, family, etc. This is known as transference.

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Special points of interest:

- *Difficult Patient?*
- *Legislation update*
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Finally, “active listening” is an effective technique to manage strong emotions while communicating. When actively listening to a patient, temporarily set aside your agenda and give the patient your full attention. When they have made a point, respond with a summary of what they have just said, and an explicit acknowledgement of the emotion they are expressing. For example, after giving the patient time to speak, reply with “What I hear from you is that... (give a summary of what the patient has said). You must be feeling (name the emotion). Did I get that right?”

Health care providers have a professional and ethical obligation to care for their patients. As such, clinicians should do everything possible to maintain a therapeutic relationship. However, despite our best efforts sometimes a relationship can deteriorate to the point that it is no longer beneficial or effective. In such circumstances care may need to be transferred to another provider. A physician who does not terminate the patient-physician relationship properly may also find him or herself before the Board of Medicine. According to the AMA's Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, a physician may not discontinue treatment of a patient as long as further treatment is medically indicated, without giving the patient reasonable notice and sufficient opportunity to make alternative arrangements for care. According to the AMA's Code of Medical Ethics, [Opinion 8.115](#), you have the option of terminating the patient-physician relationship, but you must give sufficient notice of withdrawal to the patient, relatives, or responsible friends and guardians to allow another physician to be secured.

With these ideas in mind, the tense emotional situations we all encounter as physicians can become opportunities for improving our therapeutic relationships with all of our patients, making us more effective clinicians. With practice, the satisfaction that comes from learning to successfully navigating challenging relationships enriches our practice of medicine.

Free Continuing Education Program on Illegal Online Drug Sales

The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) and the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP) recently announced a free online continuing education program (CME/CPE) for physicians and pharmacists focused on the growing problem of illegal online drug sales.

This program, entitled “Internet Drug Sellers: What Providers Need To Know,” is a learning activity that encourages participants to discuss the risks and patient safety issues involved with purchasing medications from a rogue Internet pharmacy. The program is available at www.fsmb.org/free-online-cme-cpe-activity.

The course will guide participants through understanding the common characteristics of illegal online drug sellers while raising awareness about the issue. After completing the program physicians and pharmacists will have a proficient understanding of this issue and be armed with the current tools and resources to identify fraudulent online pharmacies.

Recent studies found that nearly 97% of online drug sellers are operating illegally, and one in two websites selling medicine online peddle counterfeit drugs. Consumers, lured by the cheap drugs promised on rogue websites, may end up paying a higher price than anticipated, as medications may be counterfeit, ineffective, or adulterated with other ingredients, including potentially toxic chemicals. The problem is significant, with an estimated one in six Americans purchasing drugs online without a valid prescription at some point.

Experts agree that education is the key to combating the problem effectively. As trusted health care providers, physicians and pharmacists play a key role in educating consumers regarding the risks associated with purchasing medications online from an unverified source. This program offers providers the information necessary to protect patients from illegal online drug sales. Input for this activity was provided by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, faculty from the University of California at San Diego, LegitScript and the Federation of State Medical Boards.

Reminders

License Renewals began on April 15th.

Physicians will see additional questions on the renewal application this year. There are eight (8) additional questions and four (4) optional questions added to the existing questions. The purpose of these additional questions are to elicit more specific information about the physician population and practice in Idaho.

To understand the shifting demographics, the impact of the Affordable Health Care act and the country's aging population we will all need greater insight into the makeup of the physician workforce not only in our state but nationally.

The information provided will help identify work-force issues for the health care community and policy makers alike.

Address Changed ?

During renewals the Board sees an increased number of returned mailings due to changes in addresses that have not been updated with the Board.

To help prevent a courtesy renewal reminder or renewed license from being returned we ask that you insure your address is updated before completing your renewal application.

IDACARE PROFILES

The Patient Freedom of Information Act [Idaho Code§ 54-4603](#) requires an update to the profile at license renewal. To update your profile visit the [IDACARE website](#)

Legislation

The Idaho Board of Medicine participated in the Telehealth Council created by HCR 46 and the drafting of [HB 189](#) the Telehealth Access Act signed by the Governor on March 25, 2015.

The Board also introduced legislation to allow participation in the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact. [HB 150](#) was signed by the Governor On March 25, 2015.

Prescription Profiles

Need help with obtaining a profile, want to review recent changes in Pharmacy laws? Visit the [Board of Pharmacy website](#) for information and instructions.

2014 IDAHO BOARD OF MEDICINE LICENSURE REPORT

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
PHYSICIANS - MD												
New Licenses Issued	250	227	267	307	352	415	337	296	351	338	395	503
Licenses Renewed	3267	3359	3343	3435	3620	3842	4238	4366	4314	4437	4509	4613
Active	3517	3586	3610	3742	3807	4257	4411	4509	4665	4775	4904	5116
Inactive	213	238	232	202	187	169	164	153	146	137	133	129
PHYSICIANS - DO												
New Licenses Issued	20	27	28	47	39	51	42	35	54	48	77	70
Licenses Renewed	205	216	231	254	295	316	363	424	407	443	477	536
Active	225	243	259	301	324	367	396	415	461	491	554	606
Inactive	11	14	17	13	10	9	9	9	9	9	10	8
PHYSICIAN - VOLUNTEER												
New Licenses Issued	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	0
Licenses Renewed	0	0	0	1	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	1
Active	0	0	0	3	3	4	4	6	4	4	3	1
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS												
New Licenses Issued	51	44	61	60	75	57	48	49	74	83	97	82
Licenses Renewed	239	270	307	354	402	447	509	504	515	608	635	709
SUPERVISING PHYSICIANS												
New Registrations Issued	64	13	95	72	113	62	79	84	83	89	85	119
Registrations Renewed/Reinstated	251	286	244	314	368	322	425	475	520	604	596	619
SUPERVISING PHYSICIANS												
COSMETIC & LASER												
New Registrations Issued	0	0	0	0	14	9	6	4	5	7	3	5
Registrations Renewed	0	0	0	0	0	14	23	23	25	26	31	28

2014 IDAHO BOARD OF MEDICINE LICENSURE REPORT

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ATHLETIC TRAINERS												
New Licenses Issued	28	18	20	25	22	25	25	22	30	33	46	40
Licenses Renewed	115	121	125	128	128	134	144	149	150	158	162	177
DIRECTING PHYSICIANS												
New Registrations Issued	0	27	14	4	8	3	8	3	4	6	5	5
Registrations Renewed	0	0	27	38	38	23	41	47	48	49	54	57
RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS												
New Licenses Issued	63	46	58	69	76	53	77	66	100	90	62	104
Licenses Renewed	528	553	570	578	610	651	660	693	717	763	792	794
POLYSOMNOGRAPHY												
Technician - New Permits Issued	0	22	0	9	10	15	12	13	13	3	7	5
Permits Renewed	0	0	16	8	13	11	18	12	16	13	5	7
Technologist - New Permits Issued	0	21	2	8	10	11	9	18	13	15	11	9
Permits Renewed	0	0	21	21	29	36	45	48	59	75	76	77
DIETITIANS												
New Licenses Issued	24	17	31	40	33	29	33	41	39	50	51	49
Licenses Renewed	327	307	302	314	344	356	371	383	403	434	469	487

**Idaho Board of Medicine
2014 Discipline and Prelitigation Report**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
DISCIPLINE SUMMARY										
Lic. Revoked/Surrender/Suspend	10	9	3	6	3	3	6	7	2	7
Lic. Denied/Withheld/Withdrawn	3	3	4	5	7	6	3	3	0	2
Lic. Restricted/Limited	6	3	9	12	5	7	6	9	12	14
Rehab S&O-Alcohol/Drugs	2	6	1	8	3	8	16	7	6	6
Hearings, Interviews	7/7	7/3	6/1	4/2	0/5	8/3	0/10	6/2	6/5	4/7
Cases Opened	251	296	254	233	226	191	243	248	209	244
Reprimands/Admonitions	21	26	32	27	23	22	28	24	17	15
PRELIT. SCREENING										
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Hearing Requests	119	104	102	120	125	115	113	115	111	111
Number of Defendants	204	178	175	231	221	227	201	245	201	195
Hearings Completed	114	102	109	103	138	132	120	110	120	102
Findings										
With Merit	19	26	27	19	21	28	19	17	18	17
Without Merit	78	54	62	60	83	73	84	78	88	70
Some/Possible Merit	6	0	7	7	5	8	2	3	3	2
Claims Wdrwn/dsmsd/std	11	22	13	9	14	10	12	8	3	7

Idaho Board of Medicine Licensing Statistics by County

All Active Licenses As Of 4/1/2015

	<u>ATs</u>	<u>MDs</u>	<u>DOs</u>	<u>Ds</u>	<u>PAs</u>	<u>LRTs</u>	<u>PGTs</u>	<u>PSGs</u>
Ada	98	1306	114	177	281	325	8	32
Adams	0	3	1	0	0	1	0	0
Bannock	15	170	37	50	68	29	0	3
Bear Lake	0	12	0	1	3	1	0	0
Benewah	0	11	3	2	1	2	0	1
Bingham	3	37	16	6	15	20	0	2
Blaine	3	73	3	5	5	5	0	0
Boise	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	0
Bonner	1	72	7	7	6	12	0	0
Bonneville	6	218	50	25	67	48	0	6
Boundary	0	7	2	2	1	3	0	0
Butte	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canyon	19	165	30	19	58	96	1	8
Caribou	1	3	1	0	2	1	0	0
Cassia	0	22	7	3	4	9	0	0
Clark	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Clearwater	0	20	0	2	5	3	0	0
Custer	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0
Elmore	0	14	9	3	5	6	1	0
Franklin	1	5	1	4	1	0	0	0
Fremont	0	5	1	3	3	1	0	1
Gem	0	8	1	2	4	6	0	1
Gooding	0	6	3	2	10	3	0	0
Idaho	1	13	3	1	3	4	0	0
Jefferson	1	2	4	6	11	8	0	2
Jerome	1	10	0	5	3	7	0	2
Kootenai	11	315	26	40	54	47	0	6
Latah	18	47	5	16	8	5	0	1
Lemhi	0	9	2	0	3	1	0	0
Lewis	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Lincoln	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	1
Madison	2	32	11	6	22	11	0	0
Minidoka	0	6	5	4	1	8	0	1
Nez Perce	5	105	12	15	17	15	0	1
Oneida	0	0	2	1	2	2	0	0
Owyhee	0	0	0	2	3	3	0	0
Payette	3	17	1	5	15	7	0	0
Power	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0
Shoshone	1	9	3	2	6	4	0	1
Teton	1	12	1	2	5	1	0	0
Twin Falls	4	164	35	28	36	40	0	3
Valley	1	21	3	2	7	8	0	0
Washington	0	7	4	2	3	4	0	0
Out of State	25	2266	216	92	64	161	1	17
Total	221	5198	621	546	810	913	11	89

Board Actions

BOARD ACTIONS

PLEASE NOTE

Some physicians have similar names, please verify information by license number on our [web site](#). Details of the action are available on the web site.

Explanation of terms:

- Stipulation: an agreement, admission, or concession.
- Stipulation and Order: an agreement between the Board and the practitioner regarding authorization to practice or placing terms or conditions on the authorization to practice.
- Suspension: temporary withdrawal of authorization to practice.
- Reprimand: a formal admonishment of conduct or practice.
- Revocation: cancellation of the authorization to practice.

Scott R. Hiatt, DO
O-289 Nampa, ID

Board Action-License Revoked

Travis Stafford, MD
M-12346 Everett, WA

Board Action-Satisfaction of Order-Administrative fine

Robert M. Mena, MD
M-8898 Jerome, ID

Board Action-Modification of Stipulation and Order

Margo Saunders, MD
M-6030 Rupert, ID

Board Action-Termination of Stipulation and Order

Stanley A. Toelle, MD
M-5638 Coeur d'Alene, ID

Board Action- Stipulation and Order, prescribing limitation

Charles Roberts, MD
M-12506 Spokane, WA

Board Action-Administrative fine, failure to comply with Patient Freedom of Information Act

Terri L. Turner, DO
O-0814 Spokane, WA

Board Action-Administrative fine, failure to comply with Patient Freedom of Information Act

Kevin McClusker, MD
M-12632 Eagle, ID

Board Action-Administrative fine, failure to comply with Patient Freedom of Information Act

John Zhang, MD
M-12632 Memphis, TN

Board Action-Administrative fine, failure to comply with Patient Freedom of Information Act

Jack K. Davis, DO
O-112 Pocatello, ID

Action-License suspension terminated per Health and Welfare order.



IDAHO STATE BOARD OF MEDICINE

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