

# How to address patients' discriminatory and/or harassing behavior towards health care professionals.

OHSU is an affirmative action and equal opportunity employer. We value diversity in our community and want to ensure that all OHSU Members, visitors and guests, including patients and their family members, support and include all of our team members. Below are some options for how to deal with patients, or their family members, if they are (or if they appear to be) behaving in a harassing and/or discriminatory manner.

## Always assess the situation for safety concerns

First, if there are any safety concerns, the OHSU member should immediately discuss the issue with his or her supervisor and promptly contact the Administrator on Duty (AOD), Patient Advocates' office and/or the Department of Public Safety (Public Safety) (503-494-4444). When contacting Public Safety, consider using one of the Codes below:

- In inpatient and ED settings, if there are immediate precursors of violence, including patient self harm, use CODE GREEN. Code Green is a coordinated-team response to patient violence. It provides a well-defined process for activating a team, working through the process, and documenting and reviewing events. Activate by calling 4-4444 or 503-494-4444.
- For inpatient, ED, Marquam Hill and South Waterfront locations, Public Safety is available for emergent safety concerns by calling 4-4444 or 503-494-4444. Use the coded phrase Dr. Strong when a threatening person is within earshot and you don't want to alert them you're calling for help. To use it, call (or ask a co-worker to call) Public Safety at 503-494-4444 and ask for "Dr. Strong" to come to a specific location.
- For all other locations, please use location-specific procedures, including 911, for emergent safety issues.



## Addressing the behavior

After assessing personal safety, consider taking the following steps:

1. If you feel comfortable, remind the patient of their responsibilities, including the Patient Rights, Responsibilities and Safety policy, and implement an appropriate bystander intervention technique(s).

**BE DIRECT:** Verbally address the person(s).

- Directly confront the patient and tell them that you think their comment or behavior is offensive and hurtful; and/or
- Remind the patient they must be considerate and respectful of people who are helping or caring for them. State that they will not be reassigned for reasons related to race, gender or other characteristics unrelated to their professional role.

**ASK FOR HELP:** Alert a manager or leader and consider calling Public Safety.

**DISTRACT OR DEFUSE:** Neutralize tension by interrupting it before it escalates further.

- Pull the person who seems uncomfortable aside and ask if they are okay.

**DELAY AND FOLLOW UP**

- Sometimes things happen so quickly that you can't intervene. If it's better to wait, or you miss an opportunity to directly intervene, make a plan and address the situation as soon as possible.

2. Escalate your concerns to your manager, leader or other administrative staff member.

- The manager should ask the impacted employees whether they are still comfortable providing care to the patient or would like the patient to be reassigned to another provider. If at any time health care professionals are uncomfortable with a patient, they have a right to disengage, if it is safe to do so.
- The manager should discuss the behavior with the patient and tell them that OHSU will not tolerate discrimination or harassment of any kind and further conduct may result in restrictions, up to and including exclusion from care.

3. Report the incident to the Patient Advocate Office ([advocate@ohsu.edu](mailto:advocate@ohsu.edu) or 503-494-7959) or Administrator on Duty.

OHSU prohibits retaliation for reporting or bringing forward any concerns. Regardless of how you decide to respond to the incident in the moment, be sure to report it to the Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Department (AAEO) at [aaeo@ohsu.edu](mailto:aaeo@ohsu.edu) or 503-494-5148.

### Strategies for how to take care of yourself and others after an incident

- Consider a debrief, in the moment or shortly thereafter, with the team involved.
- Leaders should reinforce the importance of safety and well-being and remind team members of any applicable protocols for responding to similar situations.
- Explore opportunities for impacted person(s) to reflect on the encounter in written or verbal form.
- Seek support and mentorship from colleagues.

Consider accessing confidential support resources. Information on available resources and reporting options can be found on the Respect for All Flow Chart.

### Other resources

- Requests for, or refusals of, Healthcare Providers with Specific Characteristics - OHSU Healthcare Policy (HCRI-133-POL)
- Talking Points for policy: Requests for, or refusals of, Healthcare Providers with Specific Characteristics
- Respect for All Resource Guide