

Top 10 Success Strategies: Working with Physicians with Disruptive Behaviors

Have you ever had to deal with a physician who was disruptive? If so, you are in the mainstream of many physician executives. (VPMA, CMO, and COS) We offer this guide so you can start out on the right foot when dealing with physicians, whose behaviors are disturbing, disruptive and potentially dangerous.

1. Realize you are in the mainstream. Expect 3 – 5 % of the population in any typical hospital to exhibit disruptive behaviors. A 2004 poll by the American College of Physician Executives reported that 70 % of disruptive incidents repeatedly involve the same physician.
2. Institute hospital policies to spell out acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, reporting mechanisms, and non-retaliation clauses.
3. Be clear on your stance when dealing with “special cases” such as; whistle blowers, high admitters, or highly regarded specialists.
4. Have all hospital staff sign a “statement of understanding” regarding policies and procedures for disruptive behaviors. Keep these on file.
5. Create safe environments for reporting with non-retaliation policies and assurances of confidentiality.
6. At the first report of disruptive behavior, discern if this was an unusual off day (bad hair day), an emerging pattern, or an emergency.
7. When warranted, refer for intervention as early as possible rather than allow problems to mount-up.
8. Consider intervention options and choose one(s) that best match the problem. (Coaching, Training, Monitoring, Counseling, Psychoanalysis, PWB, State Medical Board)
9. When making a referral to intervention(s), expect resistance. Create a safe emotional environment to lessen the tension. Convey that a referral demonstrates that the hospital values good physicians enough to make substantial efforts to keep them.
10. Maximize and encourage the physician’s new learning and continued growth by keeping focused on the future, not the past. Recognize and acknowledge positive changes. It might be baby steps, but expect forward movement. Keep all eyes on the prize.