



CONDUCT COUNTS!

Falsifying Documentation

SCENARIO

Selina and Jocelyn graduated from their RT programs together a few years ago. It took both of them a while to find jobs; Selina now works full time in the home care sector, while Jocelyn has cobbled together full time hours with a number of part-time hospital positions. The two friends get together regularly and, in addition to a shared love of Ryan Gosling and all things Mark Jacobs, they inevitably talk about their jobs. One recent Saturday, they had planned to meet at 7:00 p.m. but Selina called to say she got out of work early and could be at Jocelyn's before 6 o'clock. Over the course of the evening, which included dinner and a few drinks, Selina told Jocelyn that she left work early because the patient she was supposed to see at the end of the day wasn't home when she arrived at his residence. Rather than have her "Friday night ruined" by waiting around for him, Selina had returned to the office and copied another patient's oximetry results into the report and submitted it. At first Jocelyn laughed when Selina said this, but then she said: "No! Did you really? Aren't you worried that the patient's O₂ settings might be all wrong?" Selina responded that she didn't think there was actually any risk to the patient because his Sats would be checked when the next RT visited. "Besides," said Selina, "the report is really only for his HOP funding."



RESULTS

Several weeks after Selina submitted the form, the home oxygen company completed a random audit of Home Oxygen Program (HOP) applications and identified an issue with the report. Following an internal investigation, the employer terminated Selina for falsifying the pulse oximetry and submitting an application to the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) that contained fabricated information. Although Selina did not benefit directly from the HOP application, the company felt that her actions were fraudulent. A mandatory termination report was submitted to the CRTO by the home oxygen company.

The CRTO had to investigate, a process that involved interviewing company management and the patient; obtaining documents from the home oxygen company including policies and their investigation records; and reviewing standards, guidelines and policies of the profession. After completing its investigation, a panel of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (ICRC) referred Selina to the Discipline Committee with allegations of professional misconduct. These allegations included:

- falsifying a record relating to the Member's practice;
- signing a document within the member's professional capacity that the member knows contains false or misleading information;
- contravening a standard of practice; and
- engaging in conduct that would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful dishonourable and unprofessional.

PROFESSIONALISM

"Professionalism" or professional conduct is a term often used to describe the behaviours that are expected of individuals who hold a certain role in society. A "professional" is typically someone who has obtained skills that are recognized as requiring specific, intensive training and who applies those skills in a position impacting others (e.g., engineer, lawyer, RT, PT, MD, etc.). Professionals are often held to moral, ethical and legal standards because of this potential impact.



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EXPECTATION

Selina believed that her actions were victimless – that it was really just about money (government funding for home oxygen). This assumption could not be further from the truth! Selina completely forgot that as a professional, she is obligated to put the needs of her patient above all else. By deciding not to wait for the patient to arrive home (which he did just a few minutes later), he was denied an opportunity for assessment. Although no harm came from this particular missed appointment, it may not have been the case at another time or with another patient. Selina should also recognize that any time she signs a document while practising, she is representing all Respiratory Therapists to the public, employers, government agencies and colleagues from all health professions.

Also, falsifying a report that is used for funding may be viewed as fraudulent by the agency and could result in criminal charges.

BOTTOM LINE

Do not falsify any document during the course of practising – ever!

RESOURCES

[Documentation Professional Practice Guideline \(PPG\)](#)

[Standards of Practice](#)

[Commitment to Ethical Practice](#)

