



CONDUCT COUNTS!

Falsifying Documentation

SCENARIO

Meet Tom. Tom loves working in the community as a home care RT. However, Tom sometimes can get a bit excited and forget to follow appropriate steps. On this occasion, it landed Tom in trouble. On a wintery day in Northern Ontario, Tom received a referral to initiate home oxygen for a patient being discharged that same day. Tom arrived at the patient's home before the patient. Tom waited for a period of time but didn't bother to contact the hospital to check the status of the patient. In the end, he left the equipment outside the patient's home without any assessment or site evaluation. Tom knew his employer did not allow for RTs to leave equipment outside of the home, but the weather was getting bad so he thought that leaving the equipment outside the door was the best option at the time. Tom left also a folder with a phone number for the patient to call once she arrived home.

Tom received a phone call from the patient's son. Over the phone, Tom provided instructions on how to setup the oxygen tank. The patient's son seemed to understand what he was saying, and so Tom felt confident about what he had done. Still, he knew that his employer would not be happy about the situation so Tom decided to do a late entry on the patient's chart, stating that he had left the equipment inside her home after a neighbour who had a spare key let him in. Tom figured that it just a little white lie, so what harm could come from it? Furthermore, the patient was fine!

Unexpectedly, Tom's employer made a site visit to the patient's home a few days later. Tom's little white lie unraveled. It was noted by the employer that the patient was a smoker, and Tom failed to provide teaching about smoking within the vicinity of an oxygen tank. Tom would have noticed this if he set up the machine with the patient present.

As a result of the incident, Tom was terminated by his employer. The employer concluded that Tom had contravened company policies, falsified documentation, failed to use sound judgment when initiating home oxygen therapy, and placed the patient and her family at risk by failing to educate her on the safe use of oxygen related to smoking.



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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RESULTS

The CRTO received a mandatory report of termination from Tom's employer. The employer report was investigated and a panel of the Inquires, Complaints, and Reports Committee reviewed the case. They decided to refer allegations of professional misconduct against Tom to the Discipline Committee for a hearing. At the hearing, Tom was suspended for a period of time and required to complete courses on ethics and documentation, the cost of which Tom had to cover. Tom will now have a permanent disciplinary finding on the public register.

The thing that stood out from the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee panel and the Discipline Committee panel was Tom's lack of accountability and intentional cover-up. Committee members acknowledged that everyone makes mistakes, but by falsifying the records, Tom placed the patient in danger, and brought disrepute to his profession, himself and his employer.

BOTTOM LINE

If the employer had not done the follow-up visit, the patient could have suffered serious harm from a lack of appropriate education. Further, the patient now has permanent doubt about the care an RT can provide her. Tom's little white lie cost him a lot more than he bargained for.

RESOURCES

[CRTO Standards of Practice](#)

[Professional Practice Guideline on Documentation](#)

