

CONDUCT COUNTS!

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SCENARIO

Claudia (the Member) had been working at Big Tree (the Hospital) for twelve (12) years as a Respiratory Therapist, she was knowledgeable about her role and responsibilities, and provided excellent patient care. The past couple of years had been particularly challenging, a pandemic had been declared which resulted in many changes at the Hospital. All staff required the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) now more than ever.

It was noted by staff that on numerous occasions Claudia failed to wear their PPE appropriately, such as wearing their mask on their chin, and that Claudia often did not change their PPE when it became dirty.

Claudia was repeatedly reminded by senior staff that they must wear their PPE as instructed, and to change their PPE especially when they have been in direct contact with a patient who is presenting with symptoms of an infection or illness. Claudia was upset that she was getting in trouble and told senior staff that they should “back off”.

RESULTS

The College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario (the CRTO) received a report from the Hospital, stating that the Member received a 3-day suspension for failing to comply with the Hospital’s policies and procedures, in addition to being unprofessional towards senior management when corrective action was taken.

A Panel of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (ICRC) of the CRTO conducted an investigation into Claudia’s conduct to determine if Claudia committed acts of professional misconduct. The investigation included obtaining documentation from the Facility, interview statements from the Member, and witnesses. The Member was given an opportunity to respond to the Investigation Report. The Member was apologetic for not appropriately wearing PPE, and not donning and doffing PPE as required by the Hospital. The Member explained there were personal circumstances at home that contributed to them “snapping” at senior management.

Based on the information before them, The Panel issued written advice and recommendations to Claudia.

EXPECTATIONS

The panel of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee felt that Claudia’s conduct contravened the Standards of Practice, including:

Standard 2: Collaboration / Interprofessional Collaboration

- a. Work collaboratively with patients/clients, healthcare team members, and community partners to set goals, promote shared decision-making, and facilitate patient/client centred care.
- b. Communicate and interact with patients/clients, healthcare team members, and others in a manner that demonstrates respect, dignity, and appreciation of individual differences and opinions.
- d. Engage with other healthcare team members to seek information, clarify roles, and obtains their assistance when needed and provides assistance as required, to meet patient/client healthcare needs.



College of Respiratory
Therapists of Ontario

Ordre des thérapeutes
respiratoires de l’Ontario



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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Standard 3: Communication

- b. Demonstrate professionalism and respect in all forms of communication (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, written, social media).

Standard 9: Infection Prevention and Control

- a. Adhere to Routine Practices in all settings and apply Additional Precautions when required.
- b. Adhere to all current, applicable practice guidelines and policies for infection prevention and control.

Standard 12: Professional Boundaries / Therapeutic & Professional Relationships

- d. Must not make comments, enter into situations, and/or demonstrate behaviour that could be interpreted as abusive, harassing, discriminatory, disrespectful or of a sexual nature (e.g., suggestive/provocative gestures) and must take action to prevent similar behaviour in others by reporting to the appropriate authority.
- e. Refrain from maligning the reputation of any colleague.

Standard 13: Professional Responsibilities

Responsibilities to the CRTO

- b. Assume responsibility and accountability for their own actions and decisions.

Responsibilities to the Profession and the Public

- a. Comply with all current provincial and federal legislation for the protection of patients/clients, healthcare team members, the general public, and the environment.
- c. Are responsible and accountable for meeting all legal and ethical requirements of the profession (e.g., obtaining valid orders).
- d. Demonstrate integrity, objectivity, and compassion in their relationships with patients/clients, healthcare team members, students, and others.

The Panel was of the opinion that while Claudia did not intend to cause any patient harm, the risk associated with their failure to wear PPE appropriately, and not adhering to proper donning and doffing of personal protective equipment poses a serious risk to patients, colleagues, and the Member. The Panel also expressed that they appreciated the Member's acknowledgement of personal circumstances contributing to the Member's conduct, specifically their attitude towards senior staff, however the Panel would like to remind the Member that they are obligated and expected to conduct themselves with professionalism at all times.

The Panel reminded the Member that PPE serves as a protective barrier from the spread of an infection or illness. The Panel was reassured that the available information did not suggest a pattern of similar conduct. The Panel was also satisfied that the Member demonstrated remorse, insight, and accountability from their responses.

BOTTOM LINE

Respiratory Therapists are expected to adhere to infection prevention and control measures for the safety of their patients, families, themselves, and their colleagues. In addition to demonstrating professionalism at all times.

RESOURCES

[CRTO Standards of Practice](#)

[Infection Prevent & Control Clinical Best Practice Guideline](#)