



CONDUCT COUNTS!

Ethics and Professionalism

SCENARIO

Kyle always wanted to work in healthcare, during his studies he found that interacting and helping people was a great passion of his and loved his clinical placements. Fortunately, upon completing his studies, the Facility that Kyle was completing his clinical placement, Pine River Respiratory Services, was hiring. Kyle was so excited to join the team permanently! Over the next 8 years Kyle provided great patient care and always contributed to on-going improvements at Pine River.

An opportunity at Pine River arose where Kyle would be able to work from home primarily and visit patients in the community. Kyle was very excited for this independence while still being able to practice and contribute his skills as a Respiratory Therapist.

On a Friday morning, one of Kyle's friends texted him saying they booked a cottage for the weekend and wanted Kyle to join. Kyle had a home visit booked with a patient on Sunday, however he knew the patient well, that the patient was very self-sufficient, and thought to himself that he could just skip the visit, and follow-up with the Patient the next week. Kyle didn't want to tell his direct supervisor either, for fear that he would be asked to work that weekend.

After numerous hours went by on Sunday when Kyle was scheduled to visit the patient, the patient called Pine River and asked when Kyle would be arriving. Pine River was surprised to hear that Kyle was not present, and that this was uncharacteristic of him, so they sent another Respiratory Therapist to assist the patient. Fortunately, the delay of care did not impact the patient, although it could have.

RESULTS

The CRTO received a report from the Facility stating that they had terminated Kyle's employment due to a breach of trust and outlined the incident. The Registrar referred the matter to the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (ICRC) of the CRTO and requested that they appoint and investigator to determine if Kyle committed acts of professional misconduct.

The Panel approved the appointment of an investigator, and an investigation was conducted. The Member was provided with a copy of the investigator's report and invited to provide a response. The Member was extremely apologetic stating that they hadn't seen their friends in a really long time, however this was no excuse for their actions.

The Panel ordered that Kyle successfully complete a specified continuing education or remediation program (SCERP) related to ethics and professionalism known as "Professional/Problem Based Ethics" offered by The Centre for Personalized Education for Physicians. Further, the Panel ordered that the Member appear before the Panel for an oral caution.



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



College of Respiratory
Therapists of Ontario

Ordre des thérapeutes
respiratoires de l'Ontario

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

Standard 13: Professional Responsibilities

Responsibilities to the CRTO

- b. Assume responsibility and accountability for their own actions and decisions
- g. Must not contravene, or fail to maintain, a standard of practice of the profession or a published standard of the CRTO.

Responsibilities to the Profession and the Public

- 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
- m. Behave in a professional manner that presents a positive image of Respiratory Therapy to the community

Standard 14: Safety and Risk Management

- b. Plan, implement and evaluate preventive measures where possible
- c. Manage immediate risks to the safety of patients/clients, healthcare team members, and others and respond effectively to eliminate or mitigate harm
- m. Collaborate and communicate effectively with other healthcare team members to maximize patient/client safety and the quality of care

Professional Practice Guideline – A Commitment to Ethical Practice

Page 6. states:

"While seldom contemplated explicitly, there are ranges of values that are commonly considered to uphold the practice of healthcare. Many of these values would be seen as underpinning civil society in general – like honesty, courtesy and respect. Others among them are particularly relevant to professional practice – such as compassion, transparency, and accountability."

The Panel was of the opinion that although Kyle had no prior history with the CRTO, was well liked by his colleagues and his patients, he failed to act in accordance with his professional obligations and expectations. Carrying out your role and responsibilities, particularly when patients are expecting you, is integral to a patient's trust of a Respiratory Therapist.

Kyle's conduct jeopardized patient safety and the integrity of the profession which members of the public expect regulated healthcare professionals to uphold on an on-going basis. Kyle failed to foresee the risk of harm that his conduct posed to the patient and that Kyle did not properly implement the required patient care as a result of his absence. Members of the public expect regulated healthcare professionals to act in accordance with their Facility and CRTO expectations, and therefore this significantly impacted the public's trust of Kyle and Respiratory Therapists.

The Panel noted that it is important that healthcare professionals are expected to always be truthful and trustworthy and to act in the best interest of the patient. It was concerning to the Panel that Kyle thought he could "skip" this visit, rather than finding a replacement, and contacting his supervisor to let them know of his absence.

BOTTOM LINE

Act with honesty, integrity, and in good faith. It is important to be truthful and honest when situations arise. The public expects this of regulated healthcare professionals.

RESOURCES

[CRTO Standards of Practice](#)

[A Commitment to Ethical Practice](#)