



# CONDUCT COUNTS!

## PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

### SCENARIO

Lara (the “Member”) had been practicing as a Respiratory Therapist at New Valley Hospital (the “Hospital”) for the past eight years and loved providing health care in her community. Recently, Lara had switched from day shift to night shift, although she was looking forward to the change, she was weary that she would do well adapting to working through the night. Lara found that the first few weeks weren’t so bad. However, after a couple months, Lara was starting to miss being around her family and friends during the day and was having difficulty staying awake at night.

It was observed by other staff that Lara was spending a significant amount of time on her phone while at work, such as taking personal calls while not on a designated break and browsing the Internet. A few colleagues had reminded Lara that what she was doing is not allowed, however Lara didn’t listen, and this was reported to senior staff. A meeting was held with Lara, her Clinical Practice Lead, and the Head of the Department to discuss the concerns brought forward by other staff. Lara apologized and explained that she was having a hard time adjusting to her new schedule, and that she would try to refrain from using her phone while on shift.

Following the meeting, Lara was again observed taking personal phone-calls and browsing the Internet while on shift for the remainder of the month.

### RESULTS

The CRTO received a report from the Facility stating that they had suspended Lara’s employment for three (3) days as a result of her conduct. 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 Lara committed acts of professional misconduct.

The Panel approved the appointment of an investigator, and an investigation was conducted. The Facility provided the requested documentation from the investigator. Witnesses and the Member were also interviewed. Lara was provided with a copy of the investigator’s report and invited to submit a response. Lara admitted that they were struggling with night shift and that this probably wasn’t a good change for her. Lara also had a prior history before a Panel of the ICRC and was asked to speak to this as well. Lara responded that these were two separate incidents and not at all related, however, she was apologetic for coming before the ICRC again.

The Panel ordered that Lara submit a reflective essay of at least 1,000 words, addressing: why the allegations against her may represent a contravention of the Standards of Practice and Legislation, who is at risk of being impacted by her conduct and actions, and what Lara will do to ensure that similar incidents do not reoccur. Further, the Panel ordered that Lara 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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## PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

### EXPECTATION

The panel of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee felt that Lara'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

The Panel was of the opinion that while Laura may not have intended to cause any patient harm, she was evidently distracted throughout her shift jeopardizing patient care. Lara failed to act in accordance with her professional obligations and expectations. Carrying out your role and responsibilities, particularly when patients and your colleagues are expecting this of you, is integral to a patient's trust and expectations of a Respiratory Therapist and the CRTO's expectations.

Lara'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. In addition, Lara's conduct jeopardized patient confidentiality, as the Panel noted that while there were no identified privacy breaches, you can never control who may hear your conversations when on the phone with others while at work. Lara failed to foresee the risk of harm that her conduct posed to her patients and that Lara did not advocate for herself to the Hospital, when she was having trouble adjusting to her new schedule, therefore placing patients at risk.

The Panel noted that it is important that healthcare professionals are expected to know their own limitations and advocate for themselves when needed. It was concerning to the Panel that Lara put her own interests before her patients and failed to foresee the risk of harm associated with her conduct. It was also concerning to the Panel that this was Lara's second time before the ICRC and were therefore of the opinion that an essay and appearing for the Panel to be cautioned would signify the seriousness of her conduct.

### BOTTOM LINE

Respiratory Therapists are expected to conduct themselves with the required knowledge, skill, and judgement. If you are of the opinion that you do not possess the required skillsets to carry out your role and responsibilities as expected, advocate for yourself to senior staff.

### RESOURCES

[CRTO Standards of Practice](#)