

## Ethics 101 Response – Managing your reputation

Poor Dr. Smith. She worked hard in a solitary practice in a small town with no colleague to consult with. Then she sees an interprofessional consultation that is critical of her care. One assumes her name specifically was used in the criticism.

First, review the charts. Was there any possibility of malpractice? Have a friend-physician who works away from her practice review the situation by phone. (Don't mention the name of the patient concerned or the staffman's name in your conversation.)

Next comes communication, and this can be tricky. First, talk to the staffman who received the complaint about you. He/she will obviously be aware of the criticism. He/she may identify what error may have been made, which would be helpful. On the other hand he/she may be baffled by the complaint as well.

Now comes the difficult part. You have to confront the complainant, and the phone would be a good way.

Call his/her secretary and ask if you could book a telephone appointment with his/her boss. Ask the secretary to kindly dig out the chart at the appropriate time. Do not discuss any matters pertaining with the secretary. Two things may happen, either you don't hear back, or else he/she does call you.

Be polite, stick to the facts pertaining to your call. Explain you were surprised at the lack of collegiality by writing such a complaint which you believe is unworthy. Also add that his words have become part of the patient record and may expose you to legal action at a later date. In addition technically the complaint, whilst being unfounded, is libelous but that at this stage you would like to resolve the issue in an amicable way without involving third parties. Hopefully a conversation will occur in which he admits he was in error and had insufficient facts at hand. Be gracious no matter how 'hokey' his apology might be. Having gained the high ground be gracious and thank him for seeing it this way.

However you must ask him to do two important things. First he must correct the erroneous record by writing an addendum to the record ensuring a copy is sent to the staffman recipient and yourself and the hospital record, if relevant. Also he should write a letter to you confirming the error and making a copy to the recipient staffman. Dr Smith should send a copy of the correspondence to her Medical Protection Group for information only. That should be the end of the matter and you should try to hold no grudges. Don't discuss it with your friends at a future date.

On the other hand he may persist in his belief that errors were made. If that is the case you may have to pursue this through your Medical Protection Group or with the College of physicians, especially if you believe this behavior is a frequent occurrence.

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