

Can You Care too Much? Maintaining the Delicate Balance of Professional Boundaries in a New Age



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Setting the Scene



- The hospital holds an education day for patients and families about their chronic illness
- As an outcome a Facebook page is established where members of the group can interact
- Health staff agree to join
- However, there is no clear purpose regarding how the page will be used



Pitfalls

- The doctor is not a regular Facebook user
- Families begin to ask clinical questions and are disappointed they don't receive a response
- When the doctor does log on she is concerned that she is being asked medical advice which is more appropriate in a formal consultation
- Families make assumptions about the staff's commitment and concern about them
- The nurse tries to compensate by answering the posed questions

Background

- Professional Boundaries between staff and patients/ families are important and provide clear expectations
- There are many examples where professional boundaries have been crossed
- This has been complicated by technology which has no clear parameters
- Concerns that this has become a serious threat to good clinical practice

Definitions

- Involves the nature of the relationships we form with patients and their families
- It seeks to ensure that our actions, behaviour and involvement are clearly embedded in our professional role
- It encompasses actual or potential conflicts between our professional duties and other relationships that are formed

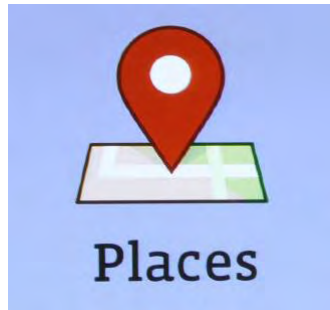


Chronic Illness Context

- The nature of chronic illness means the development of long term relationships
- The sharing of life defining moments and understanding “what it’s like”
- Health care teams and patients/families collaborate in care implying a partnership
- Familiarity in the relationship
- Working within an emotive area
- Paediatric environment adds complexity to the relationship



Crossroads



Considerations

- What guidelines does our organisation have about the use of social media?
- What expectations are held by patients/families?
- What expectations are held by the health professional?
- What is the purpose going to be?
- How does your professional and personal profile interact?

You Have a Friend Request

- Having a patient or their family member as your Facebook friend.
 - Exposure to your “non-professional” self
 - Debriefing about work colleagues
 - Blurring of personal and professional relationships
 - Do you offer this for all – “equality”
 - Concerns about saying no

Decision Making

- Recognise a potential issue/problem
- Find out any relevant information which might inform your decision making
- Before acting, consider the implications of your actions
- Evaluate your options and come to a decision
- Take time to reflect and review the outcomes of your decision

Benefits & Risks

Benefits

- Protects families and nurtures their strengths
- Promotes autonomy and resilience
- Clear role delineation
- Prevents team splitting
- Optimises care
- Clear mandate on care

Risks

- Potential to cause harm
- Family dependence
- Over involvement
- Poor life/work balance
- Tension in teams
- Favouritism
- Disparity in care offered
- Open to complaints

Principles

- Our responsibility is to set and maintain clear boundaries – and educate parents
- Boundary crossings often commence as well intentioned actions
- Some standards in boundaries are absolute, while others involve careful consideration in relation to context and orientation
- Minor boundary violations can often commence the 'slippery slope', where the relationship moves from helpful to harmful

Sharing the Responsibility

