

Partners in Quality Care

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In-Home Aides Partners in Quality Care is a monthly newsletter published for member agencies.

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What You Will Learn:

- State the need for professional boundaries between aides and clients
- List the ways boundaries can be crossed
- Describe actions to take to maintain appropriate boundaries

Happy Valentines Day!



The National Council of State Boards of Nursing has defined professional boundaries as:

- "...the limits of the professional relationship that allow for a safe therapeutic connection between the professional and the client." (includes nurse, nurse aide, others).

Having a good relationship with your clients is one of the best rewards in providing care in the home setting. Being able to provide care in a setting that enables you to provide one- to- one care for your client offers opportunities for the client to be able to stay in their home and for you to build strong relationships with the client and family.

These relationships certainly feel good to both the client and the In-home aide and while having that positive and caring relationship is so important to the client's care, it is also important to remember that as an employee of an agency and as a health care worker in the home, certain standards need to be upheld to maintain a professional relationship with the client and family. Most every agency will have policies about maintaining professional relationships with clients.

The policies would most likely address issues such as receiving gifts from clients, changing the assigned In-home aide tasks at the client or families request without checking with the supervisor who assigned the tasks, not reporting changes in the client's condition because the client asked you not to, discussing the client's care outside of the allowed discussions under privacy laws such as with friends, church members, Facebook, and others. Policies may also address the dress code that you need to adhere to in order to maintain a professional appearance as well as wearing a name badge to identify yourself.

These policies are in place for a reason and help to protect employees in a situation where there could be a misunderstanding, such as accepting money from a patient as a "bonus" which could later be considered by others as stealing from the client. Adhering to your agency's policies help protect your good name as an aide – which in itself is a gift not only to others, but to yourself!

Always act in the best interest of the patient.

Professional Boundaries - What you need to know

Nurses and in-home aides, especially in home care, are at daily risk for crossing professional boundaries. In the hospital or other settings, such as a nursing home, roles are more clearly defined, and clients' expectations of us may be clearer. When we enter someone's home, those boundary lines become blurred and sometimes are at risk of disappearing altogether.

Boundary Crossing

From the onset, the aide supervisor and aide must define the relationship with the client as professional and based on common goals as defined in the plan of care. Boundary crossings are actions or interactions outside a professional relationship. The distinction is often difficult to make.

Examples of when you are crossing the professional boundary!

- * giving personal information about yourself
- * certain types of touch
- * visiting clients after discharge from your agency
- * running errands for the patient on your days off
- * calling clients for reasons not related to your duties
- * lending personal items or taking loans from the client
- * introducing client's to your family or friends
- * giving the client a home telephone or personal cell phone number

Good communication skills and using professional language are important and go a long way in helping us avoid "boundary" problems.

Did you know that the way we address our clients and the language we use when interacting with the client and family can cause boundary problems?

Warning signs and examples of potential boundary blurring include:

1. Gift giving from/to patient/family;
2. Patients having or wanting access to provider's home phone number, or other personal information;
3. Patient/family expectations that the provider will provide care or socialize outside of clinical care settings;
4. The health care provider revealing excessive personal information with patient/family.

FAST FACTs, Medical College of Wisconsin

"Boundaries are present in many aspects of our daily lives. Speed limits, office hours, dress codes, joke-telling, and eye contact are all examples of boundaries. In interpersonal relationships, boundaries serve to maintain one's identity, protect one's personal space, and allow for harmonious interactions with others.... Professional boundaries are essential to protect the patient's comfort level and sense of safety, and to ensure the patient's best interests always remain the overriding consideration. When professional boundaries are violated, patients may experience confusion, shame, self-doubt, anger, sadness, or mistrust." Minnesota Board of Physical Therapy Newsletter, January, 2006.

Developing Friendly, Professional Working Relationships with Home Care Clients

In order to build successful working relationships with clients, home care aides should possess the following skills:

- ✓ The ability to recognize and accept the values and norms of clients
- ✓ The ability to communicate and deal with clients at their own level of understanding
- ✓ The ability to convey a genuine sense of concern for clients
- ✓ The ability to follow the aide assignment and deliver competent, compassionate care
- ✓ The ability to convey a professional image
- ✓ The ability to follow agency policy
- ✓ The ability to accurately document care
- ✓ The ability to respect the clients home and property
- ✓ The ability to communicate with supervisors and others on the team
- ✓ The ability to recognize the valuable role in-home aides play in client care

Let your client know that you have to follow your agency policy if you are asked to do anything outside of what you have been assigned to do. It is ok to let a client know that you have to speak to your supervisor first. Notify your supervisor if you feel like the client or family member is asking you to do anything that is not allowed in the agency policy or if you are unclear about your agency policy.

What kinds of relationships are appropriate for you to establish with your Home Care Clients?

- ❖ **Respectful relationships** for the client and their home and belongings as well as respect for yourself as a healthcare provider in wanting to provide quality home care services
- ❖ **Friendly relationships** with your client's in which you are able to build a caring relationship with your client and provide care that is appropriate and that involves the patient's wishes and is part of the plan of care and your assignment
- ❖ **Dependable relationships** in which you arrive at the patient's home when you are assigned to arrive or you notify your supervisor or the client according to your agency policy
- ❖ **Clinical relationships** in which you provide the care and tasks that you have been assigned to provide so that the client can have the best health outcomes possible
- ❖ **Trusting relationships** in which you properly protect the client's health information and privacy and their belongings

“Integrity: The single most important quality of a professional is integrity. It means complete and total honesty in all actions. It's what the public expects of us: Our actions must be above reproach -- whether we're on duty or not. If your partner pockets a patient's cash, that's a boundary violation. If you keep it to yourself, that's a boundary violation as well.”

Professional Boundaries: Where they are & why we cross them;
W. Ann Maggione, JD, EMT-P

Remember – you are a “gift” to the health care system and that is a wonderful image to have and keep!

Resources: Home Care Compass Home Care Modules- Association for Home & Hospice Care of NC; Professional Boundaries in the Home Care Setting, Home Healthcare Nurse, February 2002. Home Health Aide- Guidelines for Care, Marelli. Professional Boundaries and Self Care- Michelle White, RN June2010