

# Professional Boundaries

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# Professional Boundaries – Current version

Document number RCH0556

Category Human Resources

Document type Procedure

Revision 1 ([view history](#))

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Date authorised 10-Feb-2014

Next review date 10-Feb-2017

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## 1. Procedure Statement

Professional Boundaries are integral to the relationship between those working in the caring professions (Medical, Nursing, Mental Health and Allied Healthcare professionals especially) and patients, clients, families or carers.

All staff are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day to day work and for raising any associated concerns, issues or training needs with their manager.

Maintaining professional boundaries / relationships with patients who have lengthy, ongoing or frequent episodes of care can be particularly challenging in healthcare organisations like The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) which is committed to family centred care.

Delivering optimum standards of care may also involve the need to understand and practice within the social, cultural and behavioural expectations of patients, clients and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

RCH staff are expected to work within professional boundaries in their professional relationships with patients, families and colleagues.

## 2. Scope

This Procedure applies to all staff, students and volunteers throughout RCH - employees, contractors, honorary appointments and, Board Members and volunteers of the Royal

Children's Hospital. For the purpose of this procedure, reference to employee is inclusive of all kinds of person listed above.

The procedure applies at any place where an employee attends for the purpose of carrying out any functions in relation to his or her employment or profession and is not limited to premises known as, or controlled by, the RCH.

### 3. Definition of Terms

**Professional Boundaries:** limits which protect the space between RCH staff professional's power and the patient's vulnerability.

Professional boundaries may also apply to RCH staff outside the patient care domain, including:

- Staff providing education, mentoring or supervision of practice.
- Staff involved in clinical research activities or programs.
- Staff involved in collaborative or multi-disciplinary work related projects with either internal or external stakeholders.

### 4. Procedure details

RCH employees have an ethical obligation to patients and their families and to their colleagues to practise within their professional guidelines and codes of conduct.

It is unacceptable for relationships or social contact to develop between RCH staff, patients and their family members via electronic communication such as email or social networking sites.

Employees are to visit patients at home only on work related business which is documented in the plan of care.

Employees involved in direct care need to declare to their Manager if there is a pre-existing social relationship (acquaintance, friend, relative etc) with a patient. The Manager will deal with any declaration sensitively, maintain confidentially at all times and only inform others on a need to know basis.

Should there be a complaint against any RCH employee regarding professional boundaries, the relevant Manager shall discuss the matter with the employee concerned and offer appropriate counselling, support and assistance.

In the event the behavior continues the matter will be managed in accordance with the RCH Misconduct Procedure and RCH Underperformance Management Procedure. The Executive Director People & Culture will decide who is the most appropriate person to manage the matter.

## 5. Reference

- A Nurse's Guide to Professional Boundaries - Australian Nursing & Midwifery Board - February 2010
- Code of Conduct for Registered Health Practitioners - Pharmacy Board of Australia July 2009
- Code of Conduct for Registered Health Practitioners - Physiotherapy Board of Australia July 2009
- Code of Ethics - The Australian Psychological Society Ltd September 2007
- Good Medical Practice: A code of Conduct for Doctors in Australia - Australian Medical Council July 2009

## 6. Related Policy/Procedures

RCH Code of Conduct

RCH Patient's Rights and Responsibilities

RCH Informed Consent Procedure

RCH Culturally Appropriate Healthcare Delivery to Aboriginal Patients and their Families Procedure

RCH Social Media Procedure

## 6. Contacts

Executive Director People & Culture

# Historical Version: Published on 05/17/12 02:16:21 PM

## 1. Preamble

Professional Boundaries are integral to the relationship between those working in the caring professions (Medical, Nursing, Mental Health and Allied Healthcare professionals especially) and patients, clients, families or carers.

Maintaining professional boundaries / relationships with patients who have lengthy, ongoing or frequent episodes of care can be particularly challenging in healthcare organisations like The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) which is committed to family centred care.

Delivering optimum standards of care may also involve the need to understand and practice within the social, cultural and behavioural expectations of patients, clients and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Professional boundaries may also apply to RCH staff outside the patient care domain, including:

- Staff providing education, mentoring or supervision of practice.
- Staff involved in clinical research activities or programs.
- Staff involved in collaborative or multi-disciplinary work related projects with either internal or external stakeholders.

## 2. Overview/procedure description

To ensure RCH staff work within professional boundaries in their professional relationships with patients, families and colleagues.

To highlight that RCH staff should not allow a personal relationship to develop with a patient in their care or the patient's family.

It applies to all staff, students and volunteers throughout RCH

## 3. Related Policy

RCH Code of Conduct

RCH Patient's Rights and Responsibilities

RCH Harassment, Bullying and Occupational Violence Procedure

RCH Informed Consent Procedure

RCH Culturally Appropriate Healthcare Delivery to Aboriginal Patients and their Families Procedure

## RCH Social Media Procedure

### 4. Definition of Terms

**Professional Boundaries:** limits which protect the space between RCH staff professional's power and the patient's vulnerability.

### 5. Procedure details

1. Staff have an ethical obligation to patients and their families and to their colleagues to practise within their professional guidelines and codes of conduct.
2. RCH staff should not form social relationships with patients or their family members in the workplace or outside of the hospital
3. It is unacceptable for relationships or social contact to develop between RCH staff, patients and their family members via electronic communication such as email or social networking sites.
4. Staff are to visit patients at home only on work related business which is documented in the plan of care.
5. Staff are to refrain from undue familiarity and use of endearments.
6. Staff involved in direct care need to declare to their line manager if there is a pre-existing social relationship (acquaintance, friend, relative etc) with a patient. The line manager will deal with any declaration sensitively, maintain confidentiality at all times and only inform others on a need to know basis.

### 6. Staff Responsibilities

1. The Executive Director People & Culture has overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the procedure.
2. Nurse Unit Managers and Clinical Heads of Department have specific responsibility for monitoring day to day clinical practice and to challenge and address staff whose professional practice and behaviour may not be in accord with this procedure.
3. RCH Wadja Aboriginal Family Place staff can assist with interpretation and application of professional boundaries in the context of Aboriginal patients and families.
4. All staff are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day to day work and for raising any associated concerns, issues or training needs with their Nurse Unit Manager (NUM) or Head of Department (HoD).
5. All staff have a responsibility to ensure effective self-management through reasonable commitment to perform additional shifts; not working for another employer whilst on any form of approved leave; and utilizing personal leave as intended in support of exercising judgment that assists in maintaining professional boundaries.
6. Should there be a complaint against any staff member regarding professional boundaries, the Nurse Unit Manager (NUM) or Head of Department (HoD) should discuss the matter with the staff member concerned and offer appropriate counselling, support and assistance.
7. Should the behavior continue, a written complaint should be lodged with the relevant NUM / HoD detailing the allegations. Where the complaint concerns a NUM / HoD, the complaint should be submitted to a higher level of management such as the relevant Executive Director or to the Human Resources Department via the divisional HR Partner or to the Executive Director, People & Culture.

8. The Manager who receives the written complaint must report to their Manager that they have received a formal complaint and must seek the assistance of the Human Resources Department, via their divisional HR Partner in managing the complaint.
9. The complaint will be managed in accordance with the Royal Children's Hospital Disciplinary Procedure. The decision as to who the complaint is managed by will be that of the Executive Director People & Culture. In the event that this decision is disputed, the decision will be determined by the Chief Executive Officer.

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