



Professional Boundaries

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:

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- 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 confidentiality 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

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