

# Wasatch Homeless Health Care Program Safety Protocol

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## Goals & Priorities

The primary goal of the Wasatch Homeless Health Care Program is to interact with patients in such a manner that prevents the escalation of negative actions and potentially violent situations. The secondary goal is to persuade patients who act out to leave the premises willingly and quietly.

In order to achieve these goals, we must establish behavior guidelines that enable us to identify problem behaviors and deal with them effectively and appropriately before they escalate into a crisis situation. In order of priority, these are the personnel who will be involved with problem clients:

1. Front desk personnel and dental personnel who receive patients and make appointments are usually first to encounter possible difficulties.
2. Medical assistants and dental assistants are second in this role.
3. Medical and dental providers, other staff and volunteers are usually last in this interaction process.

Regardless of our role, however, when serving patients we are equally responsible for our own behavior and for protecting the security of co-workers.

## Guidelines

Here are guidelines to follow in our everyday interactions with patients. In order to promote workable relationships, we must address our patients with respect and kindness. It is imperative that we do not react to verbal abuse with anger or disrespect. Instead, we should remain calm and in control. Occasionally patients use aggressive and intimidating tactics to get what they want. It is important that we be aware of this type of behavior and learn to respond without being manipulated.

- Answer patients' questions assertively and assure them that they will be seen as soon as possible or according to their respective appointments.
- Do not offer lengthy explanations or excuses. Responding in this manner may increase the patient's frustration level.
- Simply state the facts and repeat them if necessary. If appropriate, refer the patient to other possible resources.

If a patient becomes verbally abusive or physically threatening, appropriate staff—the medical receptionist and the care coordinator should be alerted to assist in a supportive capacity. Staff members should be present on a standby basis and be prepared to intervene if required. For example, if the designated staff person becomes ineffective with the patient, another staff person should take over giving the same message.

People whose behavior escalates beyond communications will be asked to leave and be informed that it is not our policy to serve belligerent people. If they can remain calm and discuss the problem, however, we will attempt to serve them and work out a solution. If necessary, the medical receptionist and the care coordinator will escort them off the premises.

In extreme situations, the police will be called to intervene and staff will stop further involvement unless it becomes necessary to restrain a patient for his or her own safety or for the safety of the staff. In this situation, only designated, trained staff will perform the task of restraint. It is our goal to prevent escalation of a possible confrontation and to serve our patients.

In the event of a traumatic encounter, all staff members involved will meet to support each other through the debriefing process. They will document the encounter, file notations in the patient's chart, and determine if our services will be offered to the patient in the future. If the patient is denied further services, a letter stating this will be handed to him or her at the final encounter.

