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CIVILITY AND RESPECT: HOW WE CAN BE AT OUR BEST DURING THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

Content Attribution

We have reviewed, synthesized, adapted, and added to information from the following sources. Please consult these sources if you want more information.

- An Antidote to Incivility
- The Impact of Rudeness on Team Performance
- A Culture of Respect: Part 1, The Nature and Causes of Disrespectful Behaviour in Physicians
- A Culture of Respect: Part 2, Creating a Culture of Respect
- Physician-Organization Collaboration Reduces Physician Burnout and Promotes Engagement
- The Psychological Needs of Healthcare Staff as a Result of the Coronavirus Pandemic
- Alberta Medical Association's Healthy Work Environment Framework
- Respect in the Workplace: See What the Buzz is About!
- Why Being Respectful to Your Coworkers is Good for Your Business

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What are Civility and Respect?

Civility is a professional competency that refers to working together to achieve a mutual goal, often with a benevolent purpose. Civility is culturally informed and thus may manifest differently across cultures.
Respect is based on illustrating care and compassion for others and acknowledging their dignity.

- **Owed respect** refers to inherent value and right to dignity. Everyone should be given this respect. A deficiency of owed respect leads to a toxic environment, lack of joy and fulfillment, and burnout.
- **Earned respect** refers to being valued for a job well done. A deficiency of earned respect is associated with decreased motivation, accountability, and productivity.

Civility, respect, and physician wellness are intertwined. Incivility is a symptom of burnout and burnout is a consequence of toxic environments.

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Why are Civility and Respect Important Within Physicians' Workplaces?

Civility and respect are paramount to healthy work environments. Benefits include improved communication and relationships; thriving teams and individuals; inclusive and compassionate communities; improved patient safety and outcomes; a culture of growth and development; and system sustainability. Civility and respect also correlate with *reduced* burnout, turnover, and sick leave, as well as *increased* job satisfaction, perceived fairness, positive morale, and engagement.

Unfortunately, incivility and disrespect are common, occurring in both subtle and overt ways. This may take the form of disruptive, passive aggressive, or dismissive behaviours; humiliating or demeaning treatment; passive or systemic disrespect; and outright conflict or rudeness. It may also take the form of bullying, abuse, harassment, and discrimination, with direct effects on psychological safety. Incivility and disrespect have serious consequences for physicians, patients, and the system. This includes *reduced* professional fulfillment, engagement, performance, creativity, flexibility, motivation, productivity, and prosocial behaviour, as well as *increased* burnout, turnover, psychological complaints, depression, anxiety, stress, immune dysfunction, and musculoskeletal complaints. Consequences for patients include decreased psychological safety, compromised communication, and negative diagnostic and procedural performance outcomes when there is incivility and disrespect within their healthcare teams.

What Happens to Civility and Respect During Times of Crisis?

During times of stress and crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, we may alter our usual behaviours as we enter 'survival mode'. As physicians, we may experience uncertainty, loss of control, decreased competence (perceived or real), and loss of connection due to physical distancing. There may also be additional pressures outside of work. The overall increased stress levels may augment burnout, moral distress, compassion fatigue, and frustration, heightening the risk of incivility within the workplace.

This is a time of incredible change and with incredible change comes incredible opportunity.
Reframing the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to strengthen our teams, build connections and camaraderie, reinforce medicine as our professional calling, and build a supportive culture can promote and foster civility. These behaviours are contagious, thereby presenting an opportunity to spread civility and respect during this challenging time.

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How Can We Enhance Civility and Respect During the Pandemic and Beyond?

- ***Practice self-care.*** Sleep, nutrition, hydration, and exercise increase our bandwidth to build and sustain connected, compassionate, and respectful teams.
- ***Be mindful in our interactions.*** We are all in this together and many of us are working in uncomfortable situations. We all have the same goal of providing quality patient care. Focus on empathy and compassion and be mindful of how your behaviours may impact others.
- ***Practice compassion***. This applies to ourselves as well as others. We will not always be perfect. Remember that these are challenging times, and people may not be at their best, including ourselves. Be patient and seek to understand, rather than responding defensively. Have a genuine curiosity in others and how they are doing.
- ***Reflect on our professional calling.*** Finding a sense of purpose in our work helps maintain equilibrium and foster engagement, meaning, satisfaction, gratitude, and civility.
- ***Build connections.*** Positive relationships can counterbalance the effects of incivility. Zoom rooms, Facetime, phone calls, and other communication channels can support connections.
- ***Foster non-work endeavours.*** Research suggests that non-work endeavors create a buffer against the experience of rudeness at work. Those who thrive in non-work endeavours report 38% more satisfaction in handling of work situations, 80% better health, and 89% greater thriving at work.
- ***Set goals and expectations of civility.*** Develop a code of civility and hold each other accountable. If you witness incivility or disrespect, speak up and check in with those involved.
- ***Be direct and respectful in your communication.*** If you feel safe to discuss the encounter, prepare for the discussion; rehearse your ideas and accept honest feedback; be aware of non-verbal communication in yourself and others; explain how the issue (not individuals) and behaviour is harmful; prepare for emotional responses; be an active listener; and focus on going forward with mutual purpose.
- ***Be the change you want to see.*** Role model civility and respect. If you witness mistreatment of a colleague, be an upstander by speaking out against it. We all have the power to stand up to injustice, incivility, and disrespect. In doing so, we can create the change we want to see. As Albert Einstein stated, “the world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.”

Civility and respect are not virtues - they are commitments.
They’re not something we have or don’t have, they’re something we choose to practice.
modelled after Brené Brown quote on compassion

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