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real cases

Conduct Corner Series

CASE STUDY #4



SITUATION

An acupuncturist failed to recognize the inherent power differential between a practitioner and their patient. Their conduct resulted in blurred practitioner-patient boundaries and made the patient feel unsafe.

CONSEQUENCE

A complaint was made against the acupuncturist and they were found guilty of unprofessional behaviour. This resulted in various sanctions, including a mandatory suspension period.

IDENTIFIED ISSUES IN THIS CASE

The patient in this case was suffering with a chronic condition that negatively affected their quality of life. Initially, the acupuncturist provided solace and a sympathetic ear during appointments. However, the acupuncturist started to blur professional boundaries when they:

- Began hugging the patient after treatments.
- Offered to book treatments outside of clinic hours.
- Initiated personal texting conversations.
- Started pursuing a personal relationship.
- Ignored the patient's discomfort with such advances.

WHAT ACUPUNCTURISTS CAN LEARN FROM THIS CASE

Acupuncturists must be diligent in establishing and maintaining clear boundaries with patients.

In this specific case, that includes:

- Honouring the patient's boundaries.



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CASE STUDY #4 (cont...)

- Ensuring that all communication (including texts) remains professional and relevant to the patient's health.
- Refraining from pursuing personal relationships.
- Abstaining from actions that could be construed as harassment or sexual misconduct.

It is important to note that although intentions may be well meaning (i.e. attempting to provide comfort), choosing not to cross professional boundaries protects the acupuncturist and the safety of the patient.

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

For more information on what constitutes sexual misconduct and/or sexual abuse, review the [Protecting Patients from Sexual Abuse/Misconduct Standards of Practice](#) published on the College of Acupuncturists of Alberta (College) website.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT TRANSPARENCY

Disciplinary Decisions are available on the College's [website](#).

