

## The physician voice: Tips for effective advocacy

To help provide clarity when advocating for a patient or a particular cause, the CMPA offers the following tips based on a review of its medical-legal data.



### Do...



- Consider the appropriateness of the advocacy activity, and your role within it.
- Approach the issue you are advocating with professionalism, and integrity.
- Assess your own level of objectivity with a particular matter, and consider whether it is appropriate for you to engage and advocate for the intended outcome.
- Be transparent by declaring any conflicts of interest. Seek advice on real or perceived conflicts of interest.
- Select appropriate strategies and communication channels when advocating.
- Advance an informed perspective based on reliable and best available evidence.
- Discuss concerns, suggestions, and recommendations calmly and professionally.
- Rely on persuasion rather than threats. Build on areas of consensus.
- Where possible, offer multiple options and solutions for consideration.
- Develop proposals that are understandable, measurable, constructive and accountable.
- Remain open to the perspectives of others, even when they are contrary to your own. When providing feedback, ensure it is respectful, constructive and communicated appropriately.
- Be respectful in discussions with patients, colleagues, other healthcare professionals, and administrators.
- Recognize that misdirected or inappropriate advocacy can be disruptive to the provision of care and safety, as well as hamper the functioning of a healthcare team.
- Clearly distinguish when your comments are made in a personal capacity or on behalf of a third party. Seek permission before commenting on behalf of another party.
- Familiarize yourself with hospital, institution, health authority, and regulatory policies or guidelines on the role of physicians in advocacy activities, including media relations and social media use.
- Follow appropriate channels including notification of the hospital administration in advance of your planned advocacy as required by hospital policies.
- Be mindful that there is a distinction between appropriate advocacy and what can be viewed by others as disruptive behaviour.
- Ensure that you do not breach patient privacy or institutional policies/codes of conduct when advocating.

# Avoid pitfalls....

- Failing to advise parties who may reasonably be affected by your advocacy such as patients/family members, other members of a care team, a clinic, hospital, healthcare authority, etc.
- Being perceived as transgressing proper boundaries and behaviours when advocating and communicating your message.
- Becoming so entrenched in your own position or viewpoint that you fail to consider other people's opinions and views.
- Acting in an overly aggressive manner that runs counter to holding a productive and constructive dialogue.
- Disrespecting your colleagues or superiors, including in a way that creates a toxic work environment.
- Getting consumed with advocacy efforts that take away from your core responsibilities as a physician.
- Advancing a position that is uninformed or unsupported by evidence.
- Forcing your opinions or views on others in a manner that is counterproductive or unwelcomed.
- Violating the advocacy or social media policies of the hospital, facility, clinic or institution where you work.
- Acting in an unprofessional manner that does harm to your reputation or standing within the medical profession.



## Importance of perspective

Whenever engaging in advocacy, it is advisable for physicians to maintain a reasonable perspective on their efforts to effect change or make improvements in the healthcare context. There are a myriad of different perspectives on the role of physicians as advocates, including from patients, co-workers, government officials, federation executives, and College regulators. While advocacy in healthcare can take many forms, physicians can show leadership by remaining appropriately engaged and advancing their informed viewpoints in a professional, respectful and appropriate manner. Members with questions or concerns about advocacy should contact the CMPA for advice.

### Additional reading at [www.cmpa-acpm.ca](http://www.cmpa-acpm.ca)

- "The voice of professionalism within the system of care"
- "The physician voice: When advocacy leads to change"

