

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

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

