

University of Kentucky College of Dentistry: Professional Behavior & Progressive Discipline Plan Guidance Document

This document intends to define and describe professional behavior and outline components of a progressive discipline plan for the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry (UKCD). For additional information, see University of Kentucky Governing Regulation (GR) XIV: Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct and UK Healthcare Code of Conduct

Definition: Professional behavior is a form of etiquette in the workplace that encompasses 1) personal honesty, integrity, self-awareness, and respectful, courteous and thoughtful conduct towards patients, staff, students, residents, learners, colleagues, and visitors; 2) behavior in the workplace that strives to maintain a positive regard to others while avoiding excessive display of negative feelings; 3) being responsible and self-aware, and 4) is on time for appointments and responsibilities and responds to requests in a timely manner.

The intent of professional behavior is to create thoughtful work-related actions that emphasize the importance of building community, bringing harmony to a situation, and creating a positive work environment.

Unprofessional behavior is the display of disrespectful behavior or the creation of a negative disrespectful environment from communication, action, or interaction. Unprofessional behavior can incorporate, but is not limited to, one or more of the following: dishonesty, plagiarism, withholding information, overstating qualifications/experience, not adhering to rules, policies or regulations, not maintaining a professional appearance, not showing mutual respect, or not taking responsibility for assignments or mistakes.

It is important to note that a disagreement of opinion is not in itself considered unprofessional. In fact, in an academic university environment a disagreement or contrarian opinions could be encouraged to fully envision and discuss an issue, problem, or solution. Thus, there may be instances, where one faculty member may be unfairly portrayed as being disloyal, disrespectful, unprofessional, or confrontational when in fact, it is only that two or more persons disagree. Thus, it is important for interpreters of this document to distinguish disagreements, confrontation of an issue, and loyalty/disloyalty from unprofessionalism – realizing that the environment, circumstances, and perspectives may influence the interpretation of behavior.

If an employee is considered to have not exhibited professional behavior or behaved unprofessionally, the supervisor is recommended to use a progressive discipline plan to help in the management of the employee and situation. A **progressive discipline plan (PDP)** is an effective tool for addressing issues related to professional and respectful behavior between faculty members and other persons (e.g., employees, learners, patients) at a Healthcare College. A PDP provides a structured approach to correct inappropriate behavior, maintain a

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positive work environment, and ensure accountability. Below is the suggested progressive discipline plan for faculty at UKCD.

Listening and Verbal Counseling: When an incident involving unprofessional or disrespectful behavior occurs or the faculty member did not meet expectations of professional behavior, the immediate supervisor/department head, and when indicated an independent mediator (e.g., Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and development) shall sit down and have a private conversation with the faculty member involved. The supervisor (and independent mediator, if indicated) shall deliver the oral corrective warning as soon as possible after the occurrence that necessitated the action. During this conversation (informal cup of coffee), the mediator shall provide what was reported and listen to the faculty member's story. In instances where more than one person is involved, all parties are to be interviewed to ascertain a full perspective of the situation. During the listening and counseling session,

- A. The supervisor and mediator (if one is involved) should express that the College and University:
 - a. Value the employee as an important member of the healthcare team.
 - b. Encourage everyone to be respectful.
 - c. Support an environment where it is safe to speak up and there is trust.
 - d. Acknowledge there are often 2 sides to a story and listen.
 - e. Allow the recipient to respond and share their story – being cognizant that the complainer may or may not have an axe to grind.
 - f. Close by asking the recipient to reflect on their behavior and how they might respond differently in the future and make corrective action.
 - g. The supervisor also should mention that Peer Evaluation may be recommended to address the issue, if applicable.

Level 1: Awareness Intervention - If subsequent reports occur and there is a suggestion that there is an emergence of a pattern, or if the event/incident is so severe as to warrant more serious action than an oral warning, the supervisor may start the corrective process by:

- A. Promptly convene the College Professionalism Committee (Chair of Department of Oral Health Science, Chair of Department of Oral Health Practice, member of Faculty Council, Director of Student Affairs (if learners are involved), Chair of Staff Council (if staff is involved), and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Development)
- B. Listen to their story.
- C. Inform that it appears that a pattern maybe / is emerging / the incident was severe in nature.
- D. Express concerns of the faculty member and the concerns of the administration.

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- E. Provide feedback on the behavior.
- F. Emphasize the expected professional standards.
- G. Allow the faculty member to understand the impact of their behavior.
- H. Share the availability of confidential services (e.g., wellness, anger management, diversity training) if the topic arises or seems appropriate.
 - a. Note: >70% of those with a pattern respond positively to feedback.
 - b. Note: for clinicians involving a clinical situation, services/training can be mandated to maintain UK Healthcare privileges.
- I. Provide a leader-directed corrective action plan, as needed to connect the individual with appropriate resources, including coaching, physical and mental health screening, conflict management, etc. Peer Evaluation is also a potential component of this step.
- J. Document the unprofessional behavior and corrective action plan in the annual Performance Evaluation and include percent weight for professionalism in applicable section. At Level 1, professionalism is suggested to be weighted < 50% for the affected category or categories, allowing the faculty member to still 'meet expectations' for the applicable categories, unless deemed severe in nature (see Level 2 below).
- K. As per University of Kentucky Administrative Regulation (AR) 2:1-1 F3., documentation relevant to professional function may be included in the Standard Personnel File. The faculty member has the right to review these materials and shall be offered the opportunity to document his or her response to them.
- L. As per University of Kentucky Administrative Regulation 3:10, the College must have an appeals process for faculty evaluations.

Level 2: Guided Intervention by Authority - Performance Improvement Plan (PIP): If the unprofessional behavior persists, escalates, or is deemed severe, the behavior shall be fully investigated by the College Professionalism Committee. If this committee determines that the behavior is persistent or severe, then the Division Chief shall be informed and directed to issue a written warning and **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)** to the faculty member. The written warning should outline the specific incidents, describe the impact on the college community, restate the expected standards of behavior, and explain the consequences of further violations. This warning should be documented and placed in the faculty member's personnel file. The **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)** is a formal document that outlines the specific areas of concern, sets clear expectations for improvement, and establishes a timeline for achieving the desired changes. The plan should include regular check-ins and measurable goals to track progress. The PIP should be reviewed and signed by both the faculty member, their supervisor, and Department Chair. The performance evaluation will incorporate

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the weighted professionalism component for each affected category. At Level 2, professionalism can be weighted up to 50% for the affected categories and can result in suspension of specific activities or 'does not meet expectations' for one or more applicable categories.

- A. As per AR 3:11, A Consequential Review process must be instituted for any faculty employee receiving successive unsatisfactory performance or "merit" reviews in a "significant area of work". For the purposes of this policy, a significant area of work is defined as a Distribution of Effort Agreement greater than 20% in the areas of instruction, research or service. The review is summative in nature and requires a plan to improve performance within a specified period. This plan may be exempted for extenuating circumstances (e.g., health problems).

Disciplinary Intervention - Suspension: If the faculty member's behavior is deemed severe or continues to be unprofessional or disrespectful, despite the PIP, a suspension may be necessary. The duration of the suspension will depend on the severity of the behavior and should be determined in accordance with the college's policies, University administrative and governing regulations, and legal regulations. During the suspension period, the faculty member should be informed of the expectations for reinstatement and provided with resources, such as counseling or training programs, to help them address their behavioral issues. A suspension will automatically weight the professionalism component of all evaluation categories with >50% weight per area and a summative evaluation of 'does not meet expectation'.

Termination: In cases where all previous steps have failed to rectify the faculty member's behavior, termination may be the final course of action. Termination should only be considered after a thorough investigation, documented incidents, and clear evidence of the individual's failure to meet the required standards of professionalism and respect. Termination should follow the established procedures and adhere to applicable legal guidelines.

It's important to note that the PDP should be implemented consistently and fairly, ensuring that all faculty members are treated equally. Additionally, any disciplinary action taken should comply with relevant laws, regulations, and collective bargaining agreements in place at UK Healthcare.

Key Considerations:

- Clear communication: Throughout the PDP, it is essential to listen to all parties involved, communicate clearly with the faculty, provide them with written documentation and opportunities for discussion or appeal.

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- Consistency: Discipline should be administered consistently and fairly to all faculty, regardless of personal relationships or other factors.
- Supportive resources: Faculty should be made aware of support resources available to them, such as counseling services, academic assistance, or mentoring programs, to help them address any underlying issues contributing to their misconduct or poor performance.