

# Dealing With Difficult Patients



NCCDP In-service Toolkit



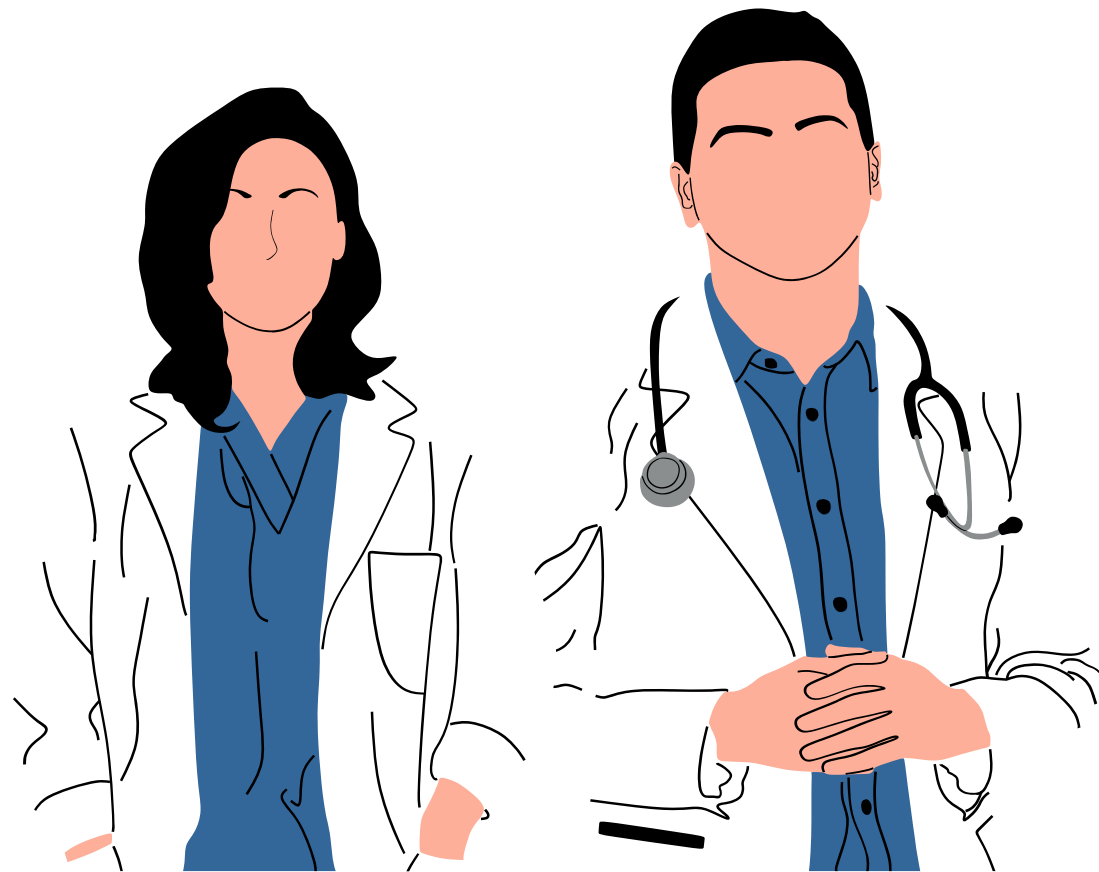
National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners

# Objectives

- The student will be able to identify provider guidelines.
- The student will be able to describe frontline strategies.
- The student will be able to name universal tactics.

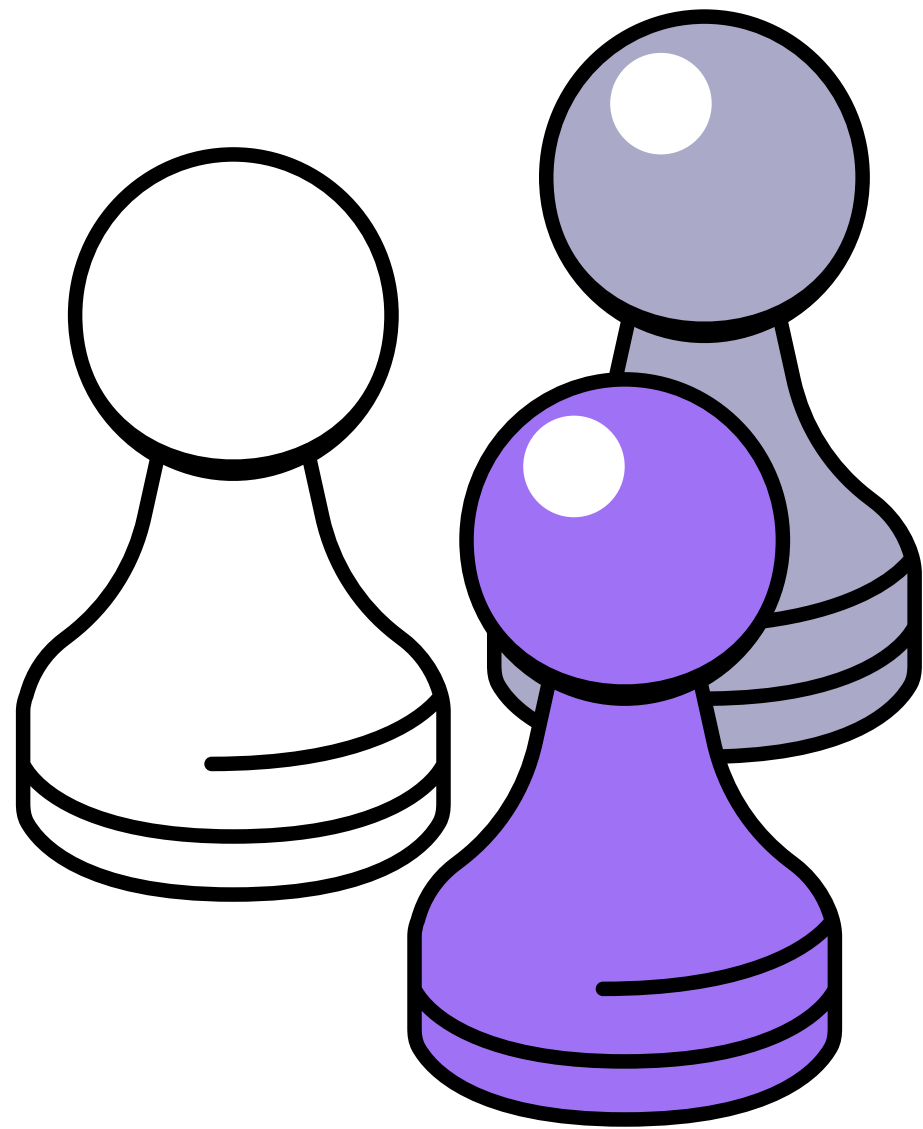


# How Can You Tackle Difficult Patients?



- People are not happy to visit the doctor, hospital, or long-term care setting.
- They are in pain, upset, or sick.
- Sometimes they are rude, angry, or otherwise hard to handle.
- This takes a toll on employees' mental health and morale.
- This can lead to both the patient and the employee being upset.

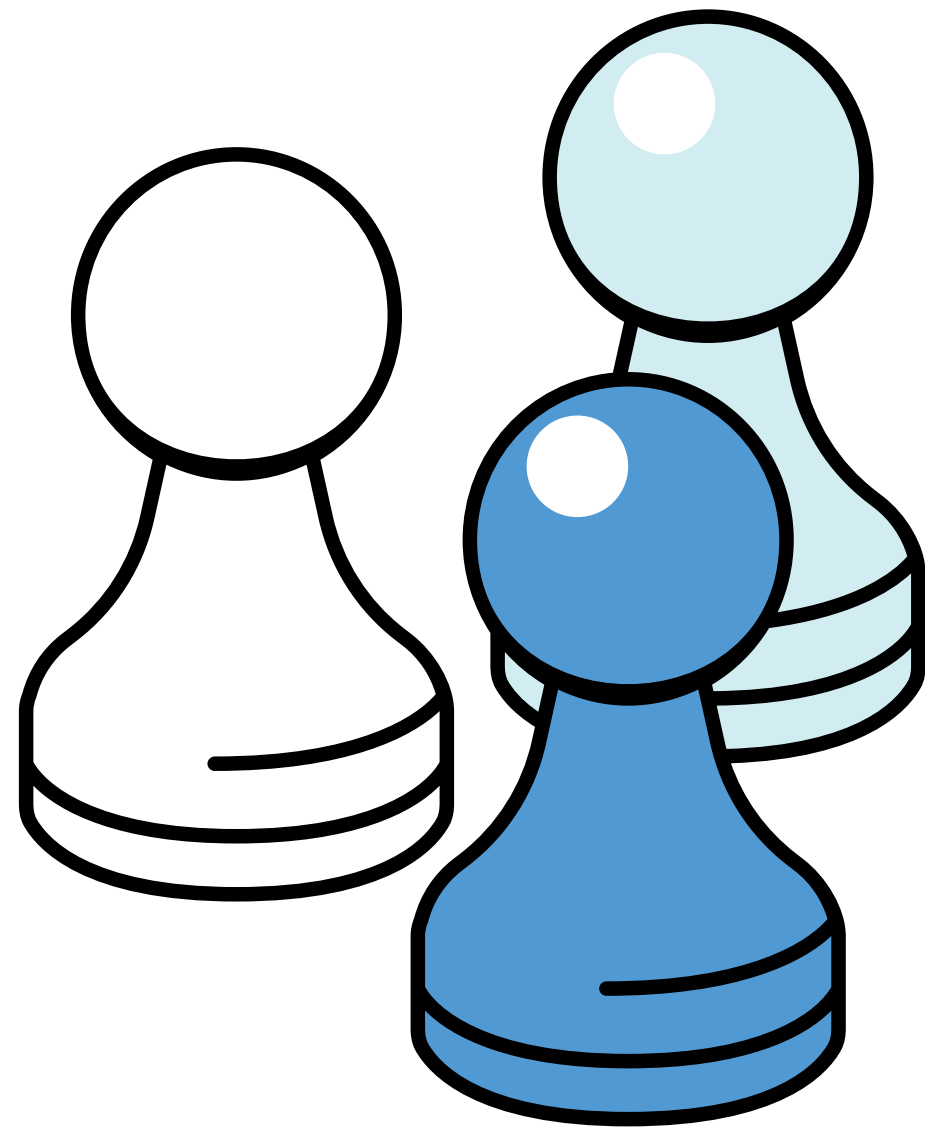
# Universal Tactics



**Certain strategies for handling difficult patients can be used:**

- Stay calm.
- Engage with them.
- Avoid negative language.
- Use empathy.
- Address basic needs.

# Universal Tactics



## ...Continued

- Problem-solve.
- Wait them out.
- Set boundaries.
- Shake it off.

# Provider Guidelines



- Strengthen boundaries.
- Say sorry.
- Take a seat.
- Trust your instincts.
- Be consistent.
- Document it all.
- Give it up.

# Diagnostic Issue

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- Two recent studies found that difficult patients are more likely to receive an incorrect diagnosis, regardless of the time spent on care or the complexity of the case.
- Studies define difficult patients as ones who engage in disruptive behaviors. Physicians had a significantly higher chance of misdiagnosing them compared to neutral or non-disruptive patients.

# How Can Physicians Address This Issue?



- Make diagnostic checklists more structured to provide guidance when under pressure from a patient.
- Use computer-assisted diagnostic tools when dealing with difficult patients.
- Be more diligent with follow-ups for particularly tricky patients.

# Frontline Strategies



**It's Not Only Providers Who Deal With Difficult Patients!**

- A quiet facility with happy patients starts with employees who first interact with patients—frontline workers, nurses, and nonclinical staff.

# Frontline Strategies



## Inform Your Staff About Handling Various Patient Attitudes With These Strategies:

- Train staff on different types of situations they might encounter to build confidence in their abilities to clearly explain information to patients and defuse potentially stressful situations.
- Let staff know it is okay to end a call or interaction with someone who is berating them so they don't feel like a verbal punching bag.

# Frontline Strategies



## ...Continued

- Establish clear and detailed procedures for handling abusive or rude patients, which allows employees to feel more comfortable in their roles.

## Procedures might include:

- Calling a security guard.
- Asking the patient to leave or go outside.

# Frontline Strategies



## ...Continued

- Positivity is essential for frontline staff.
- It's tough for staff to stay upbeat if patients are constantly yelling at them.
- Be sure staff feel appreciated:
  - Share a kind word.
  - Provide opportunities for staff to relax and shake off negativity.

# Frontline Strategies



## ...Continued

- Being proactive can make a difference between a patient screaming over a bill and the same patient walking out the door smiling.
- Front desk or registration staff should:
  - Anticipate potential issues before they happen.
  - Plan how to address potential issues.

# Frontline Strategies



## ...Continued

- For patients arguing in common areas or creating other issues:
  - Give your frontline staff the freedom and authority to take control of situations before they escalate.

# Moving Forward



- Difficult patients exist in every healthcare organization.
- Healthcare is complicated and hard for many people to understand.
- Your job is to:
  - Make the process clearer.
  - Help people feel better.
- Working on physical health isn't the only component of patient care.
- Even when patients are in bad moods, they need understanding and compassion—not stressful, loud arguments.

- It's critical to take care of yourself in these situations.
- You do not deserve to be berated or harassed because of someone else's discomfort.
- It's a fine line to walk and can be challenging at times.



Turning difficult patients into satisfied ones is part of what makes healthcare so rewarding.



# Additional Resources



- Alzheimer's and Dementia Weekly:
- <http://www.alzheimersweekly.com/2013/07/what-is-subjective-cognitive-decline.html>
- Journal of Alzheimer's Disease (Published September 24, 2015):
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4923739/>
- Subjective Cognitive Decline Among Adults Aged >45 — United States, 2015–2016:
- <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6727a1.htm>

# Certifications & Additional Information



**National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners**  
Provides Dementia Education and Dementia Certification  
to Healthcare Professionals and Frontline Staff  
[www.nccdp.org](http://www.nccdp.org)

