

## Duties and responsibilities

*Expectations of physicians in practice*

# Disarming statements can lessen conflict in the healthcare workplace

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Incivility, undue aggressiveness, and other forms of disruptive behaviour in the healthcare workplace can contribute to a toxic work environment and affect patient safety. Colleagues and other healthcare professionals who are exposed to this behaviour may complain to the medical regulatory authority (College) or hospital. The risk of setting a pattern of incivility may be lessened when healthcare providers understand how to approach disagreements with co-workers.

Knowing how to turn a disagreement into an opportunity for learning and improvement can yield favourable outcomes. When someone says something you disagree with, try alternative ways to express your dissent. One way is to make a “disarming” statement before you give your own opinion, such as one of the following:<sup>1</sup>

- "Interesting—it seems we have different points of view. Do you mind if I explain where I'm coming from?"
- "I've made different observations, probably because I had different experiences...."
- "I value your ideas on this matter and I can see why you're concerned about trying a different way. Perhaps we could look at how we can use this new approach?"

When lapses in civility occur, learning from the experience and seeking help before things escalate and a pattern of incivility develops is important. Members, including those who are physician leaders, may contact the CMPA and speak with a physician advisor—a colleague trained in dealing with the difficult situations facing today's physicians.

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## Reference

1. Gallagher R.S. *How to Tell Anyone Anything: Breakthrough Techniques for Handling Difficult Conversations at Work*. AMACOM; 2009. 240 p.

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