PATIENTS SEXUALLY HARASSING PHYSICIANS REPORT 2018
What Constitutes Sexual Harassment, Abuse, or Misconduct?

- Unwanted sexual text messages/emails
- Comments about anatomy/body parts
- Propositions to engage in sexual activity
- Being asked repeatedly for a date
- Offer of a promotion in exchange for a sexual favor
- Threats of punishment for refusal of a sexual favor
- Deliberately infringing on body space
- Unwanted groping/hugging/physical contact
- Deliberate fondling of self
- Grabbing body parts
- Rape
Who Is Sexually Harassing Physicians?

7% of physicians sexually harassed by clinicians, medical personnel, or administrators in their workplace.

27% of physicians sexually harassed by patients.
Patients' Sexual Behavior Toward Physicians

- Acted in an overtly sexual manner toward you: 17%
- Asked you out on a date: 9%
- Tried to touch, grope, or rub against you: 7%
- Asked you for a sexual encounter: 2%
- Sent you sexual emails or letters, or gave you provocative photos of themselves: 2%
- Accused you of making a pass at them or asking for sexual activity: 1%
- Other: 3%
- None of the above: 73%
Female Physicians Describe Sexual Harassment From Patients

"A patient made a comment that he was going to grab my breasts if I caused pain to him while removing his nasal packing."

"An 80-year-old man insists on hugging tightly at the end of each visit."

"I experienced an unwanted show of affection when a patient started to kiss my arm and tried to grab me. I pushed him away, told him that it was totally inappropriate, left the room, and told him that I would not continue to provide his care. He sent me flowers. At the next visit I had my manager discuss it with him. He eventually left the practice."
Male Physicians Describe Sexual Harassment From Patients

"The patient took off her shirt without being instructed to do so. I told her that was inappropriate and then had a female staff member come in to the room with the patient."

"It amazed me as a guy how unsettled this left me."

"Gifts and invitations. Waiting for me by my car in the parking lot. Invitation to touch the patient in an inappropriate way."

"I have been friended or messaged on social media by my patients, which I think is not acceptable and makes me feel uncomfortable."
Which Specialty Is Most Harassed by Patients?

Dermatology 46%  
Emergency Medicine 43%  
Plastic Surgery/Aesthetic Medicine 41%  
Diabetes/Endocrinology 38%  
Nephrology 37%  
Oncology 35%  
Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation 35%  
Psychiatry 35%  
Critical Care 33%  
Anesthesiology 30%  
Family Medicine 30%  
Gastroenterology 28%  
Internal Medicine 28%  
Neurology 28%  
Pulmonary Medicine 27%  
Surgery, Specialized 26%  
Urology 26%  
Surgery, General 25%  
Public Health & Prevention 23%  
Orthopedic Surgery 22%  
Allergy & Immunology 21%  
Ophthalmology 21%  
Cardiology 20%  
Otolaryngology 19%  
HIV/Infecitous Diseases 12%  
OB/GYN & Women's Health 12%  
Pediatrics 12%  
Pathology 11%  
Radiology 10%
How Did Physicians Respond to Patients Who Behaved Inappropriately?

- I said no/told the patient to stop: Women 62%, Men 39%
- I made sure that I was no longer alone with that patient: Women 51%, Men 61%
- I dismissed the patient from my practice: Women 11%, Men 6%
- I accepted the patient’s advances: Women 1%, Men 0%
- Other: Women 17%, Men 17%
How Did Physicians Respond to Patients Who Tried to Touch, Grope, or Rub Against Them?

- I said no/told the patient to stop: 71% (Women), 43% (Men)
- I was no longer alone with that patient; I asked a nurse or medical staff member to be present during any encounters with that patient: 51% (Women), 57% (Men)
- I dismissed the patient from my practice: 9% (Women), 10% (Men)
- I accepted the patient’s advances: 2% (Women), 1% (Men)
- Other: 14% (Women), 17% (Men)
How Physicians Dealt With Patient Harassment

"I've advised patients to keep the visit professional and they have obliged."

"I try to stay professional and let them know I am here as a physician. If they cannot act appropriately, I'll have to ask them to leave or follow another provider."

"I was polite in my denial, reported incidents to my supervisor, who assigned patient care to another provider and spoke with the patient to discontinue attempts or he would be excused from the practice."
Survey Method

• Online survey
• 6235 respondants from 20 specialties
• March 2-April 23, 2018
• Margin of error 5.9%

Medscape - July 2018
When the Physician is Harassed by the Patient

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No Disclosures
Prevention

• Keep it professional

• Talk to the patient so they know what to expect

• During PE, adjust patient to avoid awkward positioning

• If prompted, speak of your spouse/significant other but keep it basic
If Prevention Doesn’t Work

• Ignore it

• Address it

• Bring in another staff member

• End the visit (and possibly any future visits)