

# Understanding professional boundaries

## Information leaflet



To be safe and effective the relationships between staff, patients and carers must be professional, therapeutic and have a clear aim.

Professional boundaries are a set of rules which protect patients and staff from harm. Staff must understand they are in a position of power within this relationship, and this must not be abused.

Most staff follow these rules. On rare occasions when professional boundaries are crossed we need to act immediately to prevent further harm.



## What can you do?

- You can help us maintain the highest standards
- You can help protect our patients as some people will not know 'safeguarding' and also not see themselves as vulnerable.
- Help us understand and identify the early signs of a breach in professional boundaries and potential abuse
- Speak to someone straight away if you are worried
- If you have concerns, no matter how small please report them and they can be looked into.
- Your concerns will always be taken seriously, dealt with sensitively and fully investigated.

## Here are some signs:

- Contact or visits while off duty
- Sexualised or overfamiliar communication e.g. nicknames, kisses on texts
- Flirtatious behaviour e.g. lots of eye contact or repeatedly touching you
- Sharing a lot of information about themselves or others and inappropriate/unwanted physical contact
- Unnecessary communication beyond that of a professional relationship eg phoning, texting and social media contact
- Keeping in touch even though they are no longer working with you
- Please remember a vulnerable person may not see that there is anything wrong with the relationship or how it started. It's everyone's responsibility to safeguard those that are vulnerable.

## Reporting concerns:

If you are worried please let us know as soon as possible. There are several ways to get in touch. Use the one that feels most comfortable for you.

- Any manager
- Advocate or Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
- Trust Safeguarding and Public Protection Team (SAPP)  
Telephone: 0191 246 7358
- Police via 101 or local liaison officer
- Trust Complaints Team Telephone: 0191 245 6672 or email: [complaints@cntw.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints@cntw.nhs.uk)
- Chaplaincy Service - Telephone: 0191 246 6800 and ask to be put through to the on call Chaplain
- Or any other professional you feel you trust eg. Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Email: [FTSUGuardian@cntw.nhs.uk](mailto:FTSUGuardian@cntw.nhs.uk)

## **For further information please see:**

Trust Practice Guidance Note: Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults  
– Sexual Boundaries SAPGN-01

Care Quality Commission Sexual Safety on Mental Health  
Wards report 2019

Further information about the content, reference sources or production of this booklet can be obtained from the Patient Information Centre. If you would like to tell us what you think about this leaflet please get in touch.

This information can be made available in a range of formats on request (eg Braille, audio, larger print, BSL, easy read or other languages). Please contact the Patient Information Centre  
Tel: 0191 246 7288

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