Priority Topic: DIFFICULT PATIENT

Key Features:

For a single source on this topic: Difficult Encounters AAFP 2013
see also Priority Topic Violent Patient

1. When physician-patient interaction is deemed difficult, diagnose personality disorder when it is present in patients.

What you should study: see Priority Topic Personality Disorder
- also, be careful not to label every difficult patient generically as “Axis 2"

2. When confronted with difficult patient interactions, seek out and update, when necessary, information about the patient’s life circumstances, current context, and functional status.

What you should study:
✓ Challenging Doctor-Patient Interactions 2017
✓ How to manage - difficult patient AAFP 2007

3. In a patient with chronic illness, expect difficult interactions from time to time. Be especially compassionate and sensitive at those times.

✓ Just do it! see also Priority Topic Chronic Disease
4. With difficult patients **remain vigilant for new symptoms and physical findings** to be sure they receive adequate attention (e.g., psychiatric patients, patients with chronic pain).

**What you should study:**

✓ Rethinking Definitions NEJM 2013 - **not specifically about diagnosing, but a useful article on the dangers of dismissing “difficult” patients**

5. When confronted with difficult patient interactions, **identify your own attitudes and your contribution** to the situation.

**What you should study:**

✓ Difficult Encounters AAFP 2013
✓ Re-thinking the difficult patient encounter AAFP 2012

6. When dealing with difficult patients, **set clear boundaries**.

✓ Better Boundaries 2011

7. Take steps to **end the physician-patient relationship** when it is in the patient’s best interests.

**What you should study:**

✓ Ending the Doctor-Patient Relationship CMPA
✓ Ending the Doctor-Patient Relationship CPSO 2017

8. With a difficult patient, **safely establish common ground** to determine the patient’s needs (e.g. threatening or demanding patients).

**What you should study:**

✓ Angry Patient Card - Dalhousie University