

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.

What you should study:

- ✓ **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.

What you should study:

- ✓ [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 CMAA](#)
- ✓ [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](#)