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Doctor Superiority Is Dangerous to Patient Health

Ask any nurse for stories about dealing with doctors, and you will hear that American hospitals and other health care institutions have a long way to go before civility and teamwork rule the day. Why is that a malpractice prevention issue?

Nurses have a vital role as a check and balance to catch mistakes and oversights by doctors that could lead to tragic malpractice injuries. But a typical example, when a nurse quietly questions a doctor's order for a medication that the nurse doesn't think

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appropriate, is to hear the doctor say: "When you get an MD after your name, you can question what I order."

Stamping out the attitude of doctor superiority is important for everyone in the health care system, especially patients. That message came through loud and clear in letters to the editor of the [New York Times responding to a nurse's frustrated column](#) about being humiliated one too many times by a doctor in front of a patient.

The CEO of one of New York City's top hospitals: Herbert Pardes of New York-Presbyterian Hospital, wrote:

The best doctors I know consider themselves part of a team and use the team's knowledge to the advantage of the patient. They think "patient first" and draw on the experience of nurses, laboratory technicians and other medical professionals. The patient receives the doctor's best treatment advice based on the collective knowledge of the team.

Doctors who accept only their own counsel are putting ego before medicine, possibly at the expense of the patient. Hospital care should be based on collective wisdom to reach the best treatment plan. Nurses, doctors and all highly trained medical professionals each have a role to play, each of which is invaluable to the patient.

And another letter writer, Donna Nickitas, a nursing professor at Hunter College, said:

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As a nurse, I would not want my family member or my nursing students in a hospital where physicians demean and insult their nurse colleagues, thus hampering their ability to care. A culture of civility and a climate of respect and dignity not only win the day but also ensure patient safety and quality care.

So when you're in a hospital and you see doctors acting arrogantly, know that it's not just a personality quirk, but something that could be bad for the health of any patient, including you and your loved ones.

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