

Physician-Patient Relationship and

Physician-Patient Relationship and Boundaries

1. Introduction

- The physician-patient relationship is a fiduciary one, built on trust, confidentiality, and the physician acting in the patient's best interest.
- Professional boundaries protect both parties and preserve the therapeutic purpose of care.

2. Core Elements

- **Trust:** patients disclose sensitive information expecting competence and discretion.
- **Confidentiality:** clinical information must not be shared without consent except where law permits.
- **Informed consent:** patients have the right to understand and agree to treatment voluntarily.

3. Professional Boundaries

- **Boundary crossing:** a minor, often well-intentioned deviation that may still be appropriate if it serves the patient.
- **Boundary violation:** harmful or exploitative conduct, such as sexual, financial, or dual relationships.
- Maintaining objectivity prevents conflicts of interest and protects vulnerable patients.

4. Communication and Power

- The relationship carries an inherent power imbalance, so physicians must avoid coercion.
- Empathy, active listening, and shared decision-making strengthen rapport and adherence.

5. Ethical and Legal Significance

- Breaches can lead to loss of trust, disciplinary action, and malpractice claims.
- Proper documentation and clear professional conduct safeguard the relationship.