

Eli's Rehab Report

Human Resources: Draw A Firm Line Between Patient And Partner

Don't let a romantic involvement leave you on the outs with state rules.

If you think you can develop an intimate relationship with one of your patients -- get ready to face an ethics charge.

The **Minnesota State Board of Physical Therapy** has suspended physical therapist **Wayne C. Erickson** after discovering that he was sexually involved with a coworker who also happened to be his patient, according to a disciplinary order published by the board in mid-March.

Background: Erickson began performing cervical traction and stretching on his co-worker soon after she was hired to work at his facility. He provided the services either during lunch or after hours for nearly two years, the disciplinary order reported. Erickson did not keep records detailing this treatment.

Starting approximately one year from when he first began treatment, Erickson and the co-worker's relationship became intimate -- however, Erickson did not recuse himself from the patient's care.

Problem: Though Erickson and his co-worker's relationship was consensual, it violated the state's ethics statute, which state that PTs "shall not engage in any sexual relationship or activity with any patient, or engage in any conduct that may reasonably be interpreted by the patient to be sexual, whether consensual or nonconsensual, while a physical therapist-patient relationship exists" (Minnesota Administrative Rules 5601.3200 Code of Ethical Practice).

Erickson must now complete a boundaries training course and undergo a psychological evaluation to determine whether he needs therapy to distinguish the boundaries attached to his role as a caregiver and identify the differences between his personal and professional needs, the state board stipulated in the disciplinary order.

Once he completes these steps, Erickson can petition the board to stay his suspension. If he fails to comply with the board's orders -- or if he engages in other inappropriate behavior -- the board will permanently suspend his license, according to the order.