

## **Facility Incivility: Will the Meek REALLY Inherit the Earth?**

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Some insist that you cannot control the obnoxious behavior of your doctors and your colleagues. They say that the only thing that you can control is “your own reactions” to such conduct.

This passive sentiment calls to mind the (slightly amended) biblical passage:  
“The rain falls on the Just and the Unjust, but the Just get wetter, because the Unjust have just stolen the Just’s umbrellas.”

Being passive in the face of uncivil manners causes your outpatient facility atmosphere to be psychologically damaging. A mature, strong, and appropriate response can alter that rude behavior. Haven’t you gotten tired of being meek? Of being taken advantage of by the unjust?

I don’t mean for you to be rude, mean, or uncivil yourself. I don’t want the Jedi Knight in you to go over to the Dark Side. You must learn how to stand your ground, and calmly insist on being treated in a polite fashion. You need to take the time necessary to teach your physicians and coworkers civil behavior.

Why should you bother?

Much of the responsibility for our ongoing nursing shortage, after low wages and erratic schedules, comes from incivility amongst the medical staff. Heated nurse-physician interactions depress nursing morale (Rosenstein, 2002), and contribute to staff shortages and departure from careers in medicine. Uncivil behavior amongst staff harms our patients as revealed in studies in the ICU setting by Shortell (1994) and Knaus (1986). Patients in uncivil units experienced higher death rates or longer lengths of stay in the hospital. Civil units had an easier time retaining their staff. Thus, we need to teach staff the tools to take control over rude behavior in our hospitals, for our patients’ sakes as well as our own welfare.

I do not preach that insistence on respectful conduct will transform your associates’ overall behaviors, enhance their personality forever, or even give them fresh minty breath. However, “medical people” are smart, and are trainable. The pharmaceutical industry demonstrates this daily with their pens and pads of paper, subliminally schooling doctors to write their medications. You will not be able to affect a life charge, a persona change. But you should be able to tutor them to act in a consistently appropriate manner when around you. You must simply begin to stand firm and be resolute that you will be treated civilly.

We need to teach outpatient surgery staff behavior modification techniques, both subliminal and overt, to cure our incivility epidemic. We deserve a sane, courteous, collaborative workplace.

Trade meek for moxie today. Take back your umbrella.

Virginia Beach gastroenterologist, Patricia L. Raymond M.D. FACG is an author and consultant, who speaks to nurses and physicians through hospital systems and medical conventions. With her company Rx For Sanity™, she humorously leads physicians and nurses to rediscover their joy in medicine and to learn to first “Turn Care Inward”. Her book, “Don’t Jettison Medicine: Resuscitate Your Passion For The Career You Loved!” is available now. Visit [www.RxForSanity.com](http://www.RxForSanity.com) soon for complimentary information and links to better care for yourself and for your staff, and to subscribe to our FREE monthly newsletter, Rx For Sanity™ eNews, with medical humor and simple tips to enhance your life in Medicine.  
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