



**WHAT IS  
DISRUPTIVE  
PHYSICIAN  
BEHAVIOR?**

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# What is Disruptive Physician Behavior?

If you are a physician who has been accused of engaging in disruptive physician behavior, it's likely you are frustrated, confused, and have a myriad of questions. Understanding how "disruptive behavior" is defined, and when the term should be applied, is the first step in fighting your claim.

In 2021, the Washington Department of Health (DOH) adopted a policy statement regarding "disruptive physician behavior." The policy defines disruptive behavior as "an aberrant style of personal interaction with physicians, hospital personnel, patients, family members, or others that interferes with patient care or could reasonably be expected to interfere with the process of delivering good care."<sup>1</sup>

The policy further states "disruptive behavior comprises a wide variety of behaviors including overt actions such as verbal outbursts and physical threats, as well as passive activities such as failing to respond to repeated calls, not performing assigned tasks or quietly exhibiting uncooperative attitudes during routine activities."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See WMC Policy regarding Disruptive Physician Behavior, available online at: <https://wmc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/Practitioners%20Exhibiting%20Disruptive%20Behavior%20Policy%2C%20MD2021-01%20filed%20with%20Code%20Reviser.pdf>. Disruptive behavior is defined on page 2 of 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

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It is crucial for you to understand that a practitioner who has an occasional reaction out of character for that individual should not be labeled as “disruptive.” The disruptive label should only refer to physicians who exhibit a pattern of inappropriate behavior that is deep-seated, habitual, and pervasive.<sup>3</sup>

When a hospital suspects or alleges you are a disruptive physician, they may try to force you to attend a remediation program for disruptive physician behavior. Although there is no universal definition for this term, those facilities or programs are very expensive, and the costs are borne out by the provider. It is important to have an experienced attorney to help you navigate your options when and if you are accused of being a disruptive provider and/or asked to attend a remediation program.

Being labeled as a disruptive provider can have many negative consequences. For example, it can result in the initiation of an adverse peer review action at your hospital or medical facility, which could lead to the restriction or suspension of your privileges or, even worse, permanent revocation of medical staff privileges. Given the nebulous nature of the term 'disruptive provider,' it can be very difficult to defend against such allegations without the help and expertise of someone experienced with pushing back misuses of the term and any subsequent peer review process.

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<sup>3</sup> N. Reynolds et al, *Disruptive Physician Behavior: Use and Misuse of the Label*, 98 J. OF MEDICAL REGULATION 1 at 9-10 (2012).

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If you or someone you know has been accused of being a disruptive provider, you need the help of an experienced attorney to help you push back and fight against the misuse of this term. Contact Athan Law at (509) 215-4679.

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