dealing with difficult patients

Health practitioners have to deal face to face with a whole range of patients who can be very difficult and demanding. This can be a very difficult issue for junior doctors just commencing their practice.

Please remember that there are a whole range of emotions that may engulf a patient. They can
- be just plain scared
- be overbearing
- have no insight into their health issues
- be non-compliant
- push the boundaries
- even make advances to you.

They could also demand drugs from you (and make up some very inventive stories as to why they do not have their prescription with them) or they could demand medical certificates where there is no clinical justification for one.

Some of the more difficult patient interactions are where you might be caught as the “meat in the sandwich” in a Family Court matter where custody of children is being vigourously challenged and the records and your opinions are required. Finally, your patients may be abusive or even violent.

These are some of the strategies for junior doctors to deal with these tricky situations.

- Remember that dealing with such difficulties is actually common
- Reacting properly and managing the situation is part of modern medicine
- Mishandling of the situation may escalate concerns and can precipitate complaints
- Complaints can be made about your management and your professional conduct
- Remember even the most difficult patients can still have real concerns
- If you need help quickly get your hospital supervisor involved and certainly report any incidents and record these on the patient’s files as other staff need to know about them and be alert to further problems.
- Contact MIPS 24/7 on 1800 021 223 for a medico legal adviser as we can always provide advice from an experienced clinician
- Disengaging from a difficult patient can be an option, albeit difficult in a public hospital situation. Seek advice from your supervisor. It is necessary to advise your patient and ensure facilitation of continuity of care.
Resources and assistance

**Good Medical Practice**: A Code of conduct for Doctors in Australia, 3 Working with Patients
[www.medicalboard.gov.au](http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/) Go to Codes and Guidelines then Good Medical Practice

Also, remember
- your peers, supervisors and employers
- College and or professional associations
- MIPS 24/7 medico legal support 1800 021 223