

# STRATEGIES AND MESSAGES FOR DEALING WITH CLIENTS WHO ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH FRAGRANCE POLICIES

## HEALTH CARE SETTINGS

*Below is a suggested five-step method of progressive discipline of clients who do not comply with your facility's fragrance policy.*

*Several things to consider as you undertake enforcement of your policy:*

1. You have adopted the policy for a health-enhancing and morally responsible reason: to make your facility safer and accessible for all your clients, staff, visitors and (if a private practitioner) yourself.
2. *The only scenario worse than having no policy at all is having one that is weak and/or not enforced:* Non-enforcement sends a message to everyone (staff and clients) that you are not serious about your policy.
3. As you decide how to implement this advice, reflect on how you would/do handle other policy violations: e.g., habitual tardiness, missed appointments, late cancellations, failure to pay, cellphone use in restricted areas, lying, smoking on premises, disrespect toward others, etc.

### **First Step: Multiple Notifications about the Policy**

Inform clients about the policy using many methods:

- 1) Communicate a clearly worded fragrance policy (with specifics re: types of products not allowed; avoid vague terms like “fragrance, perfume, or cologne”; be sure to include scented laundry products).
- 2) Describe your policy prominently on intake paperwork and on your website (consider placing it at the top, not the bottom, of this paperwork). *Highlight in red (or in boxed text) that a client who arrives for an appointment strongly scented may have his/her appointment cancelled at the last minute and will be expected to pay a late cancellation fee.*
- 3) Place signage at front entrance and at multiple other locations in the facility, such as all treatment rooms, waiting areas and bathrooms.
- 4) *Recommended:* Provide brochures re: health risks of fragrance in plain sight in waiting room or hand them out along with the intake paperwork.
- 5) Verbally reinforce the policy with a reminder to new clients during their first visit to the office.

### **Second Step: Friendly Reminder(s)**

If a client comes to your facility and is wearing noticeably scented<sup>1</sup> products and clothes, issue a verbal “friendly reminder” about the fragrance policy. Reinforce the main messages in the policy. Some talking points:

- 1) I/we value you as a client.

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<sup>1</sup> *Health Care Without Harm* recommends a standard of “noticeable scent,” which is objective and enforceable. That is, if a fragrance is noticeable by others, then it is non-compliant with the health care facility policy.

- 2) We also value the health of all our other clients and our staff/self.
- 3) Some of our clients and staff are made ill by exposure to chemicals in fragrances.
- 4) Fragrance chemicals linger in the environment long after the person who uses products leaves.
- 5) Therefore we/I would greatly appreciate your cooperation in following the fragrance policy.

### **Third Step: Warning**

If the client continues to violate the policy, issue a verbal or written warning.

Possible messages:

- 1) I believe you are aware that we have a fragrance policy here.
- 2) I've noticed that your level of fragrance use is strong enough to affect others.
- 3) We/I have asked you to respect and follow our/my policy.
- 4) *Optional:* If you need help in knowing what products to use, here are some resources for you (websites or a handout listing resources, including Safe Cosmetics Campaign)
- 5) Be aware that many laundry products are sources of strong fragrance and the chemicals in them linger long after you leave the facility/office.
- 6) Please understand that if you come to your next appointment with a noticeable level of scent, we/I will have to reschedule your appointment for another time and you will be charged for the visit.

### **Fourth Step: Appointment Cancellation**

If the non-compliant client arrives at the next visit noticeably scented, you could say something like this:

- 1) You know I/ we have a fragrance policy for health reasons.
- 2) You have been repeatedly asked not to come to the clinic noticeably scented.
- 3) I regret that we/I cannot see you today because of your choice to continue to violate our/my policy and I will have to charge you the late cancellation fee for a visit.
- 4) Call me if/when you would like to reschedule your appointment for another time when you think you will be able to come without being noticeably fragranced.

### **Fifth Step: Dismissal from Practice**

In a formal letter from the appropriate person in your practice (office manager, provider, etc.), inform the client that because of his/her history of not following the facility's fragrance policy that, with regret, you are dismissing him or her from your panel of clients. Suggest that the client find services at one of the many other health care offices that do not have fragrance policies. Provide list of similar providers if possible. Be aware that patients in "protected classes," such as disabled, cannot be dismissed without providing proper referrals.

***A Final Note:*** Some people are more comfortable than others in enforcing policy. Where/whenever possible, intake staff, providers and managers should support each other in implementing these steps. (Note: Private practitioners who have no support staff and are not comfortable in dismissing a client could consider having a letter come from another source, such as a designated representative of the practice.)