

"Cindy, please reschedule my afternoon clinic; I am going to be out for the rest of the day," says Dr. Jones, a senior physician in a hospital-owned multispecialty group.

"But, Dr. Jones," Cindy says, while whipping off her telephone headset and turning away from the open patient registration window, "you are double booked for most of the afternoon because you canceled

your clinic twice this month already. Many of these patients have been waiting more than three months to see you!"

Jones glances furtively at the waiting room, and already half turned and heading toward the clinic exit, says, "I'm sure you will be able to smooth things over. Just tell them that I got called to an emergency."

Cindy has a suspicion that, because the weather is nice, Jones is taking off with a couple of colleagues to go sailing or play a round of golf. After all, he always sports a darn tan, comes to clinic late, and often leaves early. Cindy does not relish having to call and reschedule these patients, some of whom have already been rescheduled at least once in the past couple of months.

Cindy decides enough is enough. She calls her manager and requests a meeting as soon as possible. Her manager can sense that Cindy is upset and offers to have someone cover for Cindy so that they can talk privately.

Cindy tells the manager about the situation with Jones that happens "all the time," and how she is "sick of it," and will not "work another day under these conditions." After calming Cindy down, the manager promises to bring the matter up with the chief of the department.

To make a long story shorter, suffice it to say that this conflict continues to mushroom to involve several more individuals (the chief medical officer, the executive director of the clinic, the director of human resources, and the union representative) before Jones is ever made aware that Cindy has filed a formal complaint about him. When he is finally confronted, in a meeting with the chief medical officer and the director of human resources, he is caught completely off guard.

After all, the incident happened several weeks ago, and Cindy did not mention anything to him about it. They have continued to work together, in his opinion, as if nothing were wrong. He is also surprised to find out that Cindy has been keeping a tally of the number of times that he has canceled his clinic, left early, or started clinic late.

Jones goes from astonishment to red-faced anger in a few minutes. It is clear to all that the relationship between Cindy and the doctor is irreparable. Jones is labeled as a disruptive physician. Cindy is not welcome in any department because the other physicians are fearful of being targeted. Cindy eventually resigns, and Jones feels betrayed and unappreciated by his staff and his employer.

If you were the manager in this case, how would you have handled the situation?

Reproduced from Pierce, K. P. (2009, January/February). Healthy conflict resolution. *Physician Executive*, 35(1), 60-61.