

You must set boundaries and not accommodate the substance abuse by covering up inappropriate behavior. Abusers sometimes lose their families and jobs before they receive help. As a health-care professional, you have the knowledge and ability to help these people obtain the assistance they need.

Substance Abuse and Legal Issues

If any of your colleagues is impaired, report the behavior to your supervisor or office manager immediately. If the impaired colleague has a license, your supervisor should report the behavior to the state Board of Medicine, Board of Nursing, or another board, depending on the license. Most licensing boards will not take away a person's license to practice permanently unless that person has caused serious harm while impaired. The board may limit this colleague's practice for a period of time or indefinitely. For example, a nurse who is having an addiction problem may be barred from working in a facility with controlled substances on the premises. If you fail to report this colleague and he or she harms a patient, coworker, or himself or herself, you could be held responsible because you could have prevented the situation.

If you suspect any other member of the community (e.g., patients, their families, clergy) of being impaired, you need to follow your agency policy regarding the steps to take to handle the situation appropriately. If no one is in danger from the impairment, following your agency policies should protect you legally from any repercussions of your actions.

S U M M A R Y

- Drug regulations are instituted to protect the public from the use, sale, and consumption of worthless or dangerous medications.
- The FDA approves drugs for sale in the United States, determining which will be available over the counter and which will require a prescription.
- All drugs must be proven safe and effective before they can be approved and marketed. Each drug must go through extensive development and clinical trials.
- Researchers use several phases of clinical trials to test the effects of a drug with the goal of determining effectiveness, side effects, toxicity, and interactions.
- The pharmaceutical company submits a new drug application (NDA) to the FDA, with the results of the scientific testing, for approval.
- The pharmaceutical company gives a new drug a trade name, also known as a brand or proprietary name, for marketing purposes. No other company can use that name.
- The generic name is the official, nonproprietary name for a drug.
- The DEA ensures that addictive drugs are carefully controlled.
- Controlled substances are assigned to one of five schedules according to their potential for addiction and abuse. Schedule I drugs are the most highly addictive and are therefore most controlled.
- Coworkers or patients addicted to drugs need recognition of the addiction and interventions to assist in treatment.