Role Play - An HR Quandary

Dr. Gonzalez has been working as an internal medicine physician at a clinic for over 30 years and is well loved by the staff and patients. He's a good physician who cares for his patients and prides himself on providing good quality care.

About ten months ago, staff at the clinic began noticing some simple mistakes in his documentation and prescriptions. They would point these out and he would correct them. Since then, the mistakes have increased in frequency and significance. They did not report any of these mistakes or concerns as safety events. When asked why, they simply said "It wasn't a big deal. We fixed it before it was sent to the pharmacy. We just love Dr. Gonzalez, we'd do anything for him."

Recently, after the physician sees a patient to develop a plan of care, several patients have mentioned to nurses that they have no idea what the plan is and the nurses had to review the plan with the patient. This concerned the nurses enough that one staff member now sits in with him at every patient encounter to ensure the patient understands.

The regional director of the clinically integrated network learned of this a few weeks ago and spoke to the physician about the risk to the patients and to him. He volunteered to be seen by a neurologist for dementia as he has a history in his family. Two weeks ago he provided a note from his neurologist that he has no signs of dementia and is safe to work. However, the neurologist is well known to be a good friend of his and they have known each other for many years.
Last week, one nurse did report a safety incident with the physician. He entered a clinic room and confused the patient with the one he had just seen, so much so that he wrote prescriptions and documented the wrong information despite being informed several times by the patient and nurse that he was mistaken.

The director believes some action is needed but is unsure how to proceed. She asks the HR director for the network for help, and he suggests a quick facilitated discernment might help them think through the options.