



School of Medicine: Voicing serious concerns and ‘whistleblowing’ in a Primary Care attachment

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Introduction

During the course of your placement in primary care; both early years visits and senior clinical phase attachments, you will take part in many patient interactions, observe different healthcare professionals, and communicate with patients at different stages in their healthcare journey. We rigorously inspect teaching practices, and we are pleased that our GP tutors routinely receive excellent feedback from students. However, it is always possible that you may observe unprofessional behaviour, or are concerned that, for some reason, patients are not receiving the high standard of care that they deserve. The Francis Report, which concluded the investigation into malpractice at Mid Staffordshire hospital, referred to trainees as ‘the valuable eyes and ears’ in a clinical setting. As medical students, you are expected to follow GMC guidance, and to make the care of the patient your first concern.

What sorts of concerns might I have?

- A clinician has made serious or repeated mistakes in diagnosing or treating a patient's condition.
- A clinician has not examined patients properly or not responded to reasonable requests for treatment.
- Information about patients, students or staff has been misused.
- Patients have been treated without obtaining their consent or other valid authority.
- An individual has behaved dishonestly in financial matters, in dealing with patients, or in research.
- An individual has made sexual advances towards patients, students or staff.
- An individual has misused alcohol or drugs.
- Patients, staff or students have been harassed or bullied.
- An individual has behaved in a racist, sexist or other discriminatory manner.



What should I do if I am concerned about something I have seen?

We understand that all clinical placements can be challenging, and behaviours observed can sometimes be difficult to interpret. We recommend that your first course of action should be to discuss your concerns with someone who you trust. This could be your personal tutor, GP small group tutor, or a member of staff within the practice you are attached to. You may also find it useful to discuss your concern with a trusted fellow student, or peer mentor.

The General Medical Council has some useful guidance, and an interactive quiz, which may help you to think further about raising concerns.

'Medical students: professional values in action'

http://www.gmc-uk.org/static/media/Medical_Students/

The Division of Primary Care is committed to high standards of openness and accountability and conducts its affairs with due regard to probity. If you have any genuine concern(s) about malpractice you have witnessed, either in practice or at the University during your primary care attachment, you can raise this/these using the whistleblowing procedure (below).

1. Use the on-line reporting form <https://nottingham.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/primary-care-whistle-blowing>
2. Contact the Primary Care teaching office (0115 823 0212) and ask to speak with one of the senior teaching staff (**if you are concerned that urgent action is required to prevent harm to patients, students or staff**).



What will happen once my concern has been submitted?

Your concern will in the first instance be passed to a senior member within the Division of Primary Care for initial investigation. This will normally be one of the Primary Care community sub deans (these staff members are different to the clinical subdeans who are based in the Medical Education Centre to provide you with pastoral support). Primary Care subdeans have responsibility for quality assuring student placements within general practices and are responsible for recruiting and retaining community general practice tutors; they do not have responsibility for assessing students on placement.

Depending on the nature of the concern you have raised, the investigating officer may also be Dr Richard Knox, Deputy Director of the Primary Care Education Unit and Co-Director of professionalism, or Dr Jaspal Taggar, Director of Undergraduate Primary Care Education. If your concern is of a more serious nature then it will be flagged immediately to the appropriate body for investigation e.g. if it related to a potential criminal act it will be referred to the police. Concerns about a doctor's competency for example will be referred initially to the senior clinician at the practice in question. You will be informed of your allocated investigating officer within five working days. Your investigating officer will also communicate with you if further information is required, and will also provide you with the outcomes of the investigation if appropriate. Potential outcomes include referral of the matter for appropriate action through university or practice disciplinary procedures, referral to a professional body or referral to the police (in the case of alleged criminal activities). Some investigations may result in the need for on-going monitoring, and some may conclude that no further action should be taken. In all cases, you will be given the opportunity to meet with your investigating officer to discuss the process of the investigation. If you are not satisfied with the process of the investigation, further reports can be made to the Dean for Medical Education.

Individuals who raise genuinely-held concerns under this procedure will not be dismissed or subjected to any detriment as a result of such action. Detriment includes unwarranted disciplinary action and victimisation. If you believe that you are being subjected to a detriment as a result of raising concerns under this procedure, you should raise the matter under the student complaints procedure. Any staff member or student who victimises or retaliates against those who have raised concerns under this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.



Can I raise my concerns anonymously?

All concerns will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Although we do not routinely disclose your information, we cannot guarantee that your identity would not be revealed as part of an investigation (if this was vital for the investigation process). The on-line reporting form has the facility for you to raise concerns anonymously. School of Medicine policy dictates that we are not usually able to investigate anonymous concerns. In exceptional circumstances the Director of Undergraduate Primary Care Education (or their deputy) may decide that an anonymous concern is of such a serious nature that it must be investigated.

Where can I get further information?

The GMC has produced a useful interactive guidance which includes scenarios relating to student whistle-blowing :

Medical students: Professional values in action

http://www.gmc-uk.org/static/media/Medical_Students/

You may also like to refer to the GMC document, Medical students: professional values and fitness to practise

<https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/professional-behaviour-and-fitness-to-practise>

The BMA has produced some guidance for medical students on ethical issues including whistleblowing <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/ethics/medical-students-ethics-toolkit/10-working-with-tutors-and-senior-professionals>

The School of Medicine policy on whistle-blowing (along with other relevant policies) can be found here <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/medicine/study-with-us/undergraduate/undergraduate-medicine/policies-and-regulations.aspx>