

Northern Ireland

General Practice Specialty Training



Raising Concerns while in GP Training

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Introduction



This leaflet will provide you with information on raising concerns when in GP training. We have compiled this information following feedback from the General Medical Council after their recent visit to the Northern Ireland Deanery. It details what the GMC expects of all doctors when it comes to raising concerns, and how this translates to you as a GP Trainee. We have quoted the exact guidance from the GMC and highlighted it in blue. We have then interpreted it for GP trainees and highlighted this in yellow. We hope you will find this information useful during your time in training.

Patient Safety

**General
Medical
Council**

The GMC expects all doctors to raise concerns about patient safety.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

If you come across something which leads you to believe there is a possibility a patient could come to harm then you should raise this concern with either your Clinical Supervisor (CS) or your GP Trainer (ES).

All doctors have a duty to raise concerns where they believe that patient safety or care is being compromised by the practice of colleagues or the systems, policies and procedures in the organisations in which they work. They must also encourage and support a culture in which staff can raise concerns openly and safely.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

There is now a significant evidence base that organisations which have a culture where concerns can be raised by anyone are safer organisations. No member of staff should be undermined or 'dressed down'. A culture of mutual respect for patients and employers is necessary for individuals to raise concerns about patient care. Should you come across undermining or bullying you should challenge it through the correct protocols or through your CS or ES as a trainee, whether you are the recipient or you witness this type of behaviour. Your CS and ES have a responsibility to act and support you.

Reporting Concerns

You must not enter into contracts or agreements with your employing or contracting body that seek to prevent you from or restrict you in raising concerns about patient safety. Contracts or agreements are void if they intend to stop an employee from making a protected disclosure.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

Your obligation to raise concerns about patient safety trumps any effort to use contractual arrangements to stop you. However, such concerns are often complex and you should follow the guidance set out by the GMC.

You may be reluctant to report a concern for a number of reasons. For example, because you fear that nothing will be done or that raising your concern may cause problems for colleagues; have a negative effect on working relationships; have a negative effect on your career; or result in a complaint about you.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

Trainees often advise that they find it difficult to get feedback when they report concerns e.g. when filling in an IR1 form. This can be for various reasons – the trainee may have moved on, the concern may have been fed into another work-stream in the workplace and so on. However, trainees are still advised to report concerns as this is your duty as a doctor set out by the GMC. Senior doctors, managers etc. have an obligation to act and provide feedback and to protect you from bullying or other adverse response. In addition, the Public Interest Disclosures Act protects individuals in law when they raise a concern.

Reporting Concerns



If you are hesitating about reporting a concern for these reasons, you should bear the following in mind:

- a. You have a duty to put patients' interests first and act to protect them, which overrides personal and professional loyalties.
- b. The law provides legal protection against victimisation or dismissal for individuals who reveal information to raise genuine concerns and expose malpractice in the workplace.
- c. You do not need to wait for proof – you will be able to justify raising a concern if you do so honestly, on the basis of reasonable belief and through appropriate channels, even if you are mistaken.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

So long as you are acting in good faith you should report a concern even if it turns out you have misinterpreted events.

You must follow the procedure where you work for reporting near misses and incidents. This is because routinely identifying incidents or near misses at an early stage, can allow issues to be tackled, problems to be put right and lessons to be learnt.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

In a Trust use the relevant reporting processes DATIX, IR1 forms etc.

In a GP practice you should raise the concern with your GP Trainer.

Reporting Concerns

If you have reason to believe that patients are, or may be, at risk of death or serious harm for any reason, you should report your concern to the appropriate person or organisation immediately. Do not delay doing so because you yourself are not in a position to put the matter right.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

In a Trust report your concern to your Clinical Supervisor and/or your Educational Supervisor.

In a GP practice report your concern to your GP Trainer.

If your Clinical or Educational Supervisor is not available and the issue poses an immediate threat to a patient it should be reported to the next available senior doctor e.g. within the Trust or another GP partner in the practice.

Your Training Programme Director is also available to give you advice as to how you can raise a concern in your practice. You can also contact the GP Team, and there is a list of contacts at the back of this leaflet.

You should report the facts as you observe them. Whilst you may wish to remain anonymous this may not be practicable and whilst your identity will be protected where possible this is not absolute and patient safety overrides all other considerations.



Reporting Concerns

Wherever possible, you should first raise your concern with your manager or an appropriate officer of the organisation you have a contract with or which employs you – such as the consultant in charge of the team, the clinical or medical director or a practice partner. If your concern is about a partner, it may be appropriate to raise it outside the practice – for example, with the medical director or clinical governance lead responsible for your organisation. If you are a doctor in training, it may be appropriate to raise your concerns with a named person in the deanery – for example, the postgraduate dean or director of postgraduate general practice education.

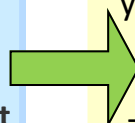


What this means as a GP Trainee-

You should raise your concern within the relevant organisation in the first instance. As an employee of the organisation you have a duty to work collaboratively. It is not usually appropriate to raise concerns in the first instance with another organisation e.g. through RQIA or reporting on the annual GMC National Training Survey. If you do so and if the concern is of sufficient gravity the GMC will be obliged to provide your details to the Postgraduate Dean so that your concern can be followed up if patients may be at risk.



You must be clear, honest and objective about the reason for your concern. You should acknowledge any personal grievance that may arise from the situation, but focus on the issue of patient safety.



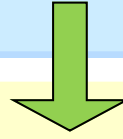
What this means as a GP Trainee-

It is recognised that it can be difficult to raise concerns, especially where there may be related or separate employment issues. Raising a concern about an organisation, a system or an individual should not be used as a mechanism to redress other issues about which you may feel sore. Your focus should be solely about patient safety issues.

There are organisations to whom a protected disclosure can be made under the Public Interest Disclosure Act (1998). See useful links at the end of this booklet.

Reporting Concerns

You should also keep a record of your concern and any steps that you have taken to deal with it.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

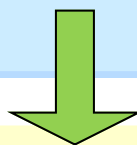
The simplest method of doing this is to record a discussion and your reflection on it by email, you may also want to reflect in your e-portfolio. You should not however identify individuals or organisations by name in your e-portfolio, keeping in mind patient confidentiality. By this means you can also keep a record of when and who you raised the concern with.



Raising a concern with a regulator

You should contact a regulatory body such as the General Medical Council (GMC) or another body with authority to investigate the issue (such as those listed at the end of this guidance) in the following circumstances.

- a. If you cannot raise the issue with the responsible person or body locally because you believe them to be part of the problem.
- b. If you have raised your concern through local channels but are not satisfied that the responsible person or body has taken adequate action.
- c. If there is an immediate serious risk to patients, and a regulator or other external body has responsibility to act or intervene.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

GP Trainees are encouraged to raise concerns with their Clinical and/or Educational Supervisor. You can also raise concerns with your Training Programme Director. If you are sufficiently concerned and you feel that there is a lack of response to your concern you can contact the GP Department in NIMDTA. Concerns can also be raised with the Associate Dean for Professional Support in NIMDTA. Only where you consider that action is not being taken by NIMDTA or patients remain at immediate risk, contact the GMC.

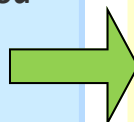
Making a concern public



You can consider making your concerns public if you:

- a. have done all you can to deal with any concern by raising it within the organisation in which you work or which you have a contract with, or with the appropriate external body, and
- b. have good reason to believe that patients are still at risk of harm, and
- c. do not breach patient confidentiality.

But, you should get advice before making a decision of this kind.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

Making a concern public should be a matter of last resort. You should exhaust all other avenues to raise your concern and you should get advice from defence bodies before making your concern public.

Help and Advice

If you are not sure whether, or how, to raise your concern, you should get advice from:

- a. a senior member of staff or other impartial colleague
- b. your medical defense body, your royal college or a professional association such as the British Medical Association (BMA)
- c. the GMC, the appropriate regulatory body listed at the end of this guidance if your concern relates to a colleague in another profession, or other relevant systems regulators if your concern relates to systems or organisations rather than individuals
- d. Public Concern at Work – a charity which provides free, confidential legal advice to people who are concerned about wrongdoing at work and are not sure whether, or how, to raise their concern (see Useful Links)



What this means as a GP Trainee-

You are working in a network of medical educators who are there to support and advise you. You should avail of this advice and expertise when needed.



Acting on a concern

All doctors have a responsibility to encourage and support a culture in which staff can raise concerns openly and safely.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

This means treating all colleagues and patients with respect. It includes clinical colleagues and those who support clinical teams e.g. Trust administrative staff, practice staff etc. All should be treated respectfully and fairly. You should also be receptive to feedback from others, using it to reflect on and improve your performance.

Concerns about patient safety can come from a number of sources, such as patients' complaints, colleagues' concerns, critical incident reports and clinical audit. Concerns may be about inadequate premises, equipment, other resources, policies or systems, or the conduct, health or performance of staff or multidisciplinary teams. If you receive this information, you have a responsibility to act on it promptly and professionally. You can do this by putting the matter right (if that is possible), investigating and dealing with the concern locally, or referring serious or repeated incidents or complaints to senior management or the relevant regulatory authority



What this means as a GP Trainee

If you have concerns of this nature e.g. the working environment, bring it to the attention of the Trust or GP practice in the first instance. It is the responsibility of Educational and Clinical supervisors to act and to feedback in order to protect you from retaliation for raising concerns

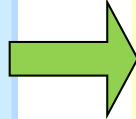
If you feel your concerns are not being addressed bring it to the attention of the GP Department in NIMDTA who can then contact your employing organisation to explore the issues.



Doctors with extra responsibilities



If you are responsible for clinical governance or have wider management responsibilities in your organisation, you have a duty to help people report their concerns and to enable people to act on concerns that are raised with them.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

There is an increasing view that all doctors carry out leadership and managerial roles in their day to day work. It is important that you role model your professional responsibilities at all times.

If you have a management role or responsibility, you must make sure that:

- a. there are systems and policies in place to allow concerns to be raised and for incidents, concerns and complaints to be investigated promptly and fully
- b. you do not try to prevent employees or former employees raising concerns about patient safety – for example, you must not propose or condone contracts or agreements that seek to restrict or remove the contractor's freedom to disclose information relevant to their concerns
- c. clinical staff understand their duty to be open and honest about incidents or complaints with both patients and managers
- d. all other staff are encouraged to raise concerns they may have about the safety of patients, including any risks that may be posed by colleagues or teams
- e. staff who raise a concern are protected from unfair criticism or action, including any detriment or dismissal.



What this means as a GP Trainee-

Should someone raise a concern with you and you cannot immediately address it on your own you should raise it with your Clinical Supervisor. You should advise your colleague that you have a duty as a doctor to do so.

What this means as a GP Trainee:

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Finally, an organisation that fosters a learning culture supports and welcomes concerns being raised. This has a direct and tangible effect on patient safety and patient care. It is recognised that an individual's performance varies for a variety of reasons- Human Factors teaches us this – and a compassionate organisation supports those whose performance on occasion falls short. A compassionate organisation is made up of compassionate individuals. There is an evidence base that compassionate organisations are safer organisations for both staff and patients.* Remember this at all times!

**King's Fund 'Caring to Change How compassionate leadership can stimulate innovation in healthcare'.*



Useful Links

Please see below a list of useful links relating to the points discussed in this document:



Website	Link
RQIA	https://rqia.org.uk/contact/complaints-feedback/whistleblowing/
GMC Whistleblowing	https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/learning-materials/whistleblowing
Public Interest Disclosure Act	https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/23/contents
NIMDTA	http://www.nimdtg.gov.uk/