Faculty of Medicine

**How do I raise a concern?**

This advice sheet covers 3 topics:

* Concerns about a fellow student’s wellbeing
* Concerns about a fellow student’s behaviour on clinical attachments
* Concerns about a doctor’s professionalism

This document is based upon BMA policy “Whistle-blowing: Guidance from the MSC” (February 2008), brought about by the recommendations in both the GMC’s document “Good Medical Practice” (2006), and the “The Medical School Charter” (September 2006), published jointly by the Medical Schools Council and the BMA’s Medical Students’ Committee. The Charter sets out the responsibilities of medical students whilst at medical school, and also clarifies medical schools’

responsibilities to students. Section 6 states “Students will act quickly to protect patients from risk if they have good reason to believe that they or a colleague may not be fit to practise. The student will immediately report any concerns to a senior member of staff using the procedures for whistle

blowing which are in force in the medical school”.

You may see a health professional or a fellow student behaving in a way that is likely to lead to harm to patients or to themselves. You should discuss this immediately with the appropriate person - it might be uncomfortable to do so, but it is important and your professional duty not to ignore behaviour if you know it to be dangerous or reckless. It can often be very important to report concerns about fellow student so that they can be given the appropriate help and support as soon as possible if they are not in a situation to find the help for themselves.

Issues that should be reported include:

* Inappropriate relationships between patients and doctors
* Acts of violence or bullying
* Substance and alcohol misuse affecting ability to work
* Acts of fraud
* Systematic failings that result in endangering patient safety
* Poor patient care
* Illness that may affect a doctors ability to practise in a safe manner
* Frequent, unexplained absence from workplace, lectures, tutorials

Advice can always be sought confidentially from the Students’ Union President (medic.president@imperial.ac.uk) or Students’ Union Welfare Officer (medic.welfare@imperial.ac.uk) on all these matters, including who to report concerns to. Disclosures shall always be strictly anonymous, and whistle-blowing does not have any implications on your future career, or for students against whom allegations are made and are subsequently proven to be unfounded. It is important to note that this process was devised by the Students’ Union for students. You should only take the actions described below for genuine welfare concerns – the system should not be abused or used for vexatious allegations against other people.

**CONCERNS ABOUT FELLOW STUDENTS’ WELLBEING**

If you are concerned about the welfare or behaviour of a fellow student, you should discuss your concerns with the Faculty Senior Tutor in the first instance.

**CONCERNS ABOUT FELLOW STUDENTS ON CLINICAL ATTACHMENTS**

If you are concerned about the behaviour of a fellow student on a clinical attachment, you should discuss your concerns in the first instance with the relevant on-site teaching coordinator (TCO). The TCO will liaise with the students’ firm leader or DCS to gain any further relevant information, which may allow them to resolve the issue locally. If the issue cannot be resolved locally then the TCO will inform relevant members of staff within the medical school, including the FEO Student Services Manager, who will investigate the matter further. The reporting of absent students may flag up those who are struggling with the course or who are ill but are reluctant to tell anyone, and so should be taken seriously at all times.

**CONCERNS ABOUT DOCTORS’ PROFESSIONALISM**

Whistle-blowing is an integral part of a doctor’s duty to maintain a professional attitude to fellow

colleagues and patients. It has been traditionally seen that those who whistle-blow are acting as

“snitches” but this is totally incorrect. Every person has an obligation to protect fellow colleagues,

patients and themselves from unprofessional conduct or acts of clinical negligence.

Many employees and future employees of the NHS are fearful of reporting acts of misconduct as they believe they will be stigmatised by colleagues, intimidated and even have their career destroyed. Their personal lives are often affected by the pressures of “snitching” on a colleague. While it is impractical to enforce an “anonymous” reporting scheme as this may lead to malicious accusations being made, every effort will be made by your local trust and medical school to ensure that the complaint remains confidential, at least in the early part of any investigation. Your details and involvement in the procedure will be disclosed only to those who require this information to make further inquiries, and a support system is in place to ensure that your name is not disclosed in any report relating to the incident. Whistle-blowers are often a voice that is highlighting important issues and is preserving the profession’s reputation.

The Director of Education is the dedicated whistle-blowing coordinator within the medical school. When considering reporting an issue, always use a simple question: would you like to be treated by this person or would you subject your family to this situation? If the answer is no then the chances are you are reporting a genuine issue in good faith. However, never use the route of whistleblowing to carry out an act of revenge or personal vendetta against an individual. As future doctors we hope that you will have the confidence to approach reporting issues of misconduct safe in the knowledge that you should, and that you will not be victimised for speaking out. Providing a safe environment for staff, colleagues and patients can only help create a better health service.