

Guidance on Providing Pastoral Support to a Trainee Involved in a Serious Incident

Executive Summary

Who needs it?

Any trainee involved in:

1. Serious untoward incident
2. Serious complaint
3. Disciplinary action
4. GMC investigation
5. Inquest
6. Investigation

Who should provide it?

1. Educational supervisor, if not directly involved in the incident
2. Specialty lead in Trust
3. Training programme director (TPD)
4. Foundation programme lead in Trust, if not directly involved in the incident
5. Where a trainee has moved Trust their current supervisor should be made aware and/or can provide support

Who needs to know about the incident?

1. Training programme and Postgraduate Dean
2. Current Trust – educators, medical director if appropriate.
3. Lead employer
4. Trainees defence organisation and BMA if appropriate, but the trainee should make the required contact

Help that might be needed:

1. Support with understanding the process of litigation, disciplinary and inquest proceedings
2. Personal support – debrief, counselling etc.
3. Attendance at court, investigations etc.
4. Referral to more specialist help: occupational health, GP, formal counselling services
5. Ensuring that everyone knows, who should know

Questions to ask when offering help

1. Am I the right person?
2. Do I need to seek advice from the training programme or Health Education England North West?
3. Does the trainee have all the expert help they need? Is there more they could access?
4. If this is not a disciplinary, might it become one and is everyone aware?
5. Can I identify alternative support when I am not available?

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Introduction

In a time where this is an increasing amount of litigation, changes to inquests, investigation of serious untoward incidents and disciplinary actions, doctors in training are more likely to be involved in these than ever. Educators can therefore find themselves being asked to provide support of both a practical and pastoral nature. Below is guidance on this area of practice and who should do this.

Who provides the initial support?

This should be the educational supervisor in most cases, the exception to this is where the supervisor is also involved in the case or may be involved in a linked disciplinary process. In the event they cannot provide support the need for support should be brought to the attention the local speciality lead or TPD or foundation programme director (FPD).

Where the trainee has moved Trust the option for local support should be explored with the trainee and the local education supervisor, who should at least be aware of the issue and can also, by agreement with all parties, provide support.

The level of support required may range from helping the trainee prepare for and/or accompanying the trainee to investigations of clinical incidents and associated court and/or debriefing after events. Involvement of an educational or clinical supervisor in accompanying a trainee to disciplinary meetings would be unusual (usually the BMA will provide this), however a trainee may need to give evidence as a witness in which case (as long as they are not conflicted and it has been agreed by HR) an educational supervisor may provide advice and support to a trainee.

Where one provides this support it is for trainee support and not as a representative of the training programme.

The trainer should make themselves conversant with the processes and timetables involved. Support through giving information about processes involved and reviewing statements and written evidence can also diminish the potential adverse stressful effects of dealing with these. Encouraging the trainee to observe deadlines is also helpful. This support is not a substitute for professional advice and the trainee should also obtain and use this. Care should be taken to ensure the professional advice from these organisations and the employer, where they are providing it, is followed and acted on.

More complex support

Where there are complex issues the trainees can access specific advice from the speciality TPD and head of school, who will delegate pastoral care.

Should the trainee have mental health issues this needs referral to occupational health, usually through HR, and their general practitioners through the usual routes. The trainer must never take on the role of medical practitioner for the trainee.

If the press are likely to be involved the Postgraduate Dean must be notified.

Trainees should be encouraged to use their defence organisation or BMA where appropriate at all times.

The lead employer may also have staff support and counselling services available and trainees should be made aware of these and helped to access them if required.

If involved in a GMC process the support services they provide are noted on their website and trainees should have their attention drawn to them.

Concluding the support process

This should be done by agreement of the person supporting and trainee and care resumed by the educational supervisor and it should be recorded formally by email and copied to the TPD, FPD or Postgraduate Dean included in the email circulation confirming this has occurred.

Summary

Where a trainee is involved in any the above events thought should be given to pastoral care and the above provides guidance. In addition the Postgraduate Dean, as Responsible Officer, should be informed as early as possible in the course of an event. Although this may have occurred by responsible officer to responsible officer, it is vital that the person providing support ensures that the training programme is aware of the incident and the impact it is having. It is also important to remember that while support should be readily available, the trainee may choose not to use it or obtain it from an external source. The focus of support should be to minimise the educational impact of the event on the trainee until an outcome is known and beyond if required.

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