



PMCT
POSTGRADUATE
MEDICAL EDUCATION
COUNCIL OF TASMANIA

creating a respectful work environment

| A guide for
Junior Doctors

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Introduction

We all have the right to work in an environment where we are treated respectfully. Respectful behaviour includes personal integrity and professionalism, practicing fairness and understanding, demonstrating respect for individual rights and differences and accountability for one's actions.

Respectful workplaces are productive, rewarding, and enjoyable for everyone. They are environments where staff work well together and recognise that behaviours and attitudes affect others and that each individual has the right to be treated with respect.

In addition to being a workplace health and safety requirement, there is ample evidence that rudeness towards staff has significant negative consequences for the employee, any observers, and the patients under their care.¹
(Reference p2

How can you contribute to a respectful workplace culture?

- Speak without judging, blaming or shaming
- Accept that others have values and opinions that are different from your own and be open-minded about their ideas, comments and suggestions
- Practice inclusivity – try to make sure that individuals or groups aren't excluded in any way
- Address conflict issues positively and constructively
- Support colleagues who are being harassed, discriminated against or treated disrespectfully.

The responsibility for building and maintaining a respectful workplace is shared by everyone

Take responsibility for your role in promoting a culture where there is a zero tolerance approach to behaviours which could be considered to be bullying, harassment, intimidation, or inappropriate workplace behaviours.

¹ Riskin et al, 2015

What is workplace bullying?



Bullying at work is **'repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety'**. Repeated behaviour refers to the persistent nature of the behaviour and can include a range of behaviours over time. Unreasonable behaviour includes behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening.²

Bullying exists on a continuum of inappropriate workplace behaviour. Evidence highlights that negative and inappropriate behaviours can easily escalate into bullying if left unresolved or accepted. The key challenge for all staff, including junior doctors, is to address these behaviours early along the continuum and establish a culture that highlights these poor behaviours and responds early and effectively.

What do we know about bullying in medicine?

Bullying of, and amongst, doctors is widespread despite being illegal and breaching codes of ethics and professional standards in medicine. Both men and women perpetrate this behaviour and everyone is at risk of both being a target of bullying and/or witnessing. Certain groups are known to be particularly vulnerable to bullying, for example female doctors and international medical graduate.

The behaviour affects the individuals involved, the organisations they work in, and ultimately has a negative impact on patient safety outcomes.³

Everyone at the workplace has a work, health and safety duty and can help to prevent workplace bullying. Further, it is essential that as a junior doctor, you are aware that bullying is not acceptable and that support is available without impacting on your future career.⁴

² Victorian Auditor-General's Report, Bullying and Harassment in the Health Sector, 2016, pp1-2

³ Flynn, 2015; Riskin et al, 201

⁴ Adapted from "Bullying and harassment in the Health Sector (March 2016) Victorian Auditor-General's Report", and "Report to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons: Expert Advisor Group on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment. (2015)"

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

Bullying can be associated with harassment and discrimination. Under federal and state legislation unlawful discrimination occurs when someone, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than others because they have a particular characteristic such as race, colour, national extraction, sex, pregnancy, marital status, age, disability, sexual preference or other characteristic specified under anti-discrimination or human rights legislation.

Harassment at work is 'treating someone less favourably than another person or group because of a particular characteristic' such as those outlined above. Unlike bullying, harassment may be a single incident and is based on a characteristic of the affected person.⁵

What are examples of bullying behaviour?

Bullying behaviour, whether intention or unintentional, may include the following types of behaviour:

- aggressive or intimidating conduct, innuendo, sarcasm
- unreasonable criticism which is not part of the performance management process
- shouting, belittling or humiliating comments
- spreading malicious rumours
- teasing, practical jokes (eg about the worker's gender, race, culture)
- exclusion from work-related meetings, functions or events
- unreasonable work expectations, including setting tasks that are unreasonably below or beyond a person's skill level
- workplace cyber-bullying such as defamatory remarks, misleading or deceptive comments on social media

⁵ Victorian Auditor-General's Report, *Bullying and Harassment in the Health Sector*, 2016, pp1-2



What is not considered to be workplace bullying?

Reasonable management action taken in a reasonable way is not workplace bullying. This could include the allocation of work and giving fair and reasonable feedback. Single instances of inappropriate behaviour, occasional differences of opinion, non-aggressive conflict and problems in working relationships are also not bullying. However, they may have the potential to escalate to the point where it becomes workplace bullying so such behaviour should be treated with caution and noted.

How to know if you are being bullied at work?

Sometimes it can be difficult to know if the behaviour you are experiencing is bullying. Getting a friend or colleague to objectively review the behaviour to determine if it meets the definition of workplace bullying can help provide reassurance.

In reviewing the behaviour the following questions provide a good framework for consideration:

Is the behaviour being repeated?

Repeated behaviour refers to the persistent nature of the behaviour and can involve a range of behaviours over time

Is the behaviour unreasonable?

Unreasonable behaviour means behaviour that a reasonable person, having considered the circumstances, would see as unreasonable including behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening

Is the behaviour creating a risk to your health and safety?

Workplace bullying can be harmful to the person experiencing it and to those who witness it, although the effects will vary depending on individual characteristics as well as the situation.

If you are the subject of bullying or harassment what can you do?

Recognise and take action against the effect the workplace bullying or harassment is having on your life. Taking care of yourself is the most important thing you can do. It is important to address the situation early and to seek professional help if the effects are imposing on your health.

- Keep accurate records of the behaviour, dates, times, people present, what was said or done.
- If you feel confident and safe, talk to the person responsible for the behaviour, advising that it is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- Talk to a friend or colleague about the behaviour and its effects on you.
- Seek a copy of the THS Policy: Workplace Behaviour - THS Statewide Protocol - 20160203
- Report the behaviour via the THS incident reporting system SRLS
- Seek advice from your Director of Clinical Training, Medical Education Advisor or Supervisor.
- Speak to the Director of Medical Services or a member of the Human Resources department.
- Contact the THS Employee Assistance Program (Converge International 1300 687 327 Employee Assistance Program
- Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636 - 24 hour service)
- Lifeline (13 11 14 - 24 hour service)
- AMA (Peer Support Program 1300 853 338)
- Bully Zero Australia Foundation www.bzaf.org.au

It is essential that as a junior doctor you are aware that bullying is not acceptable and that support is available without impacting on your future career

If the behaviour is continuing: What else can you do?

If you are unable to resolve the behaviour within your organisation, you can take the matter further:

The Fair Work Commission
www.fwc.gov.au

WorkSafe Tasmania
www.worksafe.tas.gov.au
1300 366 322



If you have witnessed bullying behaviour what can you do?

‘The standard you walk past is the standard you are prepared to accept’.

Major General David Morrison of the Australian Army, 13 June 2013

Joanna Flynn, Chair of the Medical Board of Australia (2015) challenges doctors to accept responsibility for the culture and reputation of the medical profession and work to create environments in which respect is the dominant quality of relationships with colleagues, trainees and patients. Doctors need to know that their peers do not accept and will not tolerate bullying.

If you feel confident and safe, talk to the person responsible for the behaviour, advising that it is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

If you are unsure if what you have seen constitutes bullying, refer to the examples of bullying behaviour at the start of the document. If you believe that what you are witnessing is bullying it is important to raise this issue with the Director of Medical Services or the Human Resources Department.

References

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Some parts of this guide have been adapted with the kind permission from BAD Project PMCV.



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