

Policy for Assisting Trainees in Difficulty

Overview

Trainees can experience difficulty during their training for many reasons. This policy seeks to assist trainers and Heads of Department when supporting Trainees at these times, by helping in the identification and resolution of these difficulties. This can be extremely challenging, but ultimately very rewarding. The processes described are intended to support Trainees.

1. Professional and personal development during training requires that Trainees:

- Contribute to the work of their training department.
- Reach work-related performance standards (appropriate to their stage of training)
- Progress towards necessary levels of responsibility and autonomy.
- Meet other training requirements, such as successful completion of examinations.

Trainees in difficulty are those who are not making sufficient progress in training or who are experiencing difficulties with certain elements of their training. The difficulties encountered may include, but are not limited to, any one or a combination of the following:

- Clinical performance below that expected for the stage of training.
- Personal problems, illness and/or disability which interferes (temporarily or permanently) with training and/or performance of duties.
- Failure to pass College examinations.
- Personality traits or other Human factor issues which impair professional communication or teamwork.

2. CONCERNS ABOUT TRAINEE PERFORMANCE: IDENTIFYING TRAINEES IN DIFFICULTY

Identifying Trainees in difficulty, whose workplace performance is affected or those whose performance or progress is below the standard expected for their stage of training, is an essential role for everyone involved with the Training Program. In all situations, the welfare of patients as well as the Trainee must be carefully considered.

- (a) Staff members with concerns about any aspect of a Trainee's performance must discuss their concerns promptly with the tutor/trainer. The tutor/trainer should take steps to address such concerns by making specific, confidential enquiries about the perceived issues and gathering information from relevant staff members as well as the Trainee to establish the truth about the concerns expressed. At times, Trainees may self-report that they are having difficulty.
- (b) It should be determined whether the problem is one of conduct or training. Employment issues should be managed by the Head of Department in consultation with the employer's Human Resources Department.
- (c) The ITA Process which assesses Trainee performance across a number of domains, from a number of sources, is a useful framework to assist in determining the nature of the problem.
- (d) Unless the issues are serious (that is, threaten patient safety, or represent professional misconduct, the approach for training issues is one of a staged response, of interview, offers of support, remedial strategies to improve performance and ongoing monitoring .

3. TRIGGERS FOR FURTHER ACTION

- Trainees consistently perform at a level which is considered to be below that acceptable for a developing specialist anaesthetist, that is below the level expected for their stage of training.
- Trainees perform at a level which is considered borderline for a developing specialist anaesthetist on two successive in-training Assessments.
- Trainee performance in the ITA Process raises concerns which are considered to need immediate attention.

4. DOCUMENTATION

- The Tutor/Trainer and/or the Head of Department must maintain adequate permanent records of discussions with the Trainee. The records should include the date of the discussion, the matters raised and the views expressed by the Trainee. Any information provided that there may be disciplinary action must be clearly stated. Such information must be understood and acknowledged in writing by the Trainee. A failure to accept or acknowledge a warning would be grounds for initiating a disciplinary process. It is advisable to seek assistance from the relevant hospital Human Resources Department to ensure compliance with employment legislation.

5. PROCESSES TO BE FOLLOWED WHEN IT IS CONFIRMED THAT A TRAINEE IS IN DIFFICULTY

The procedures below should be followed, with a further review of the Trainee's performance after an agreed period. The objective is to overcome difficulties in a supportive, holistic and collaborative manner within a specified timeframe.

- The principles of natural justice must be observed. These include that the Trainee must be formally notified of all steps being taken.
- The Head of Department should be informed that an interview has been scheduled. The initial interview with the Trainee, led by the Tutor with two consultants present, should include the following:
 - A formal time should be set aside for the discussion with sufficient advance warning for the Trainee.
 - The Trainee should be offered the opportunity to bring a support person.
 - Shortcomings in performance/progress should be clearly identified.
 - The Trainee should provide a self assessment, having the opportunity to provide an explanation about the difficulty they are experiencing (this may identify issues which will facilitate offering support in the most appropriate way).
 - Clear expectations on required performance/progress should be outlined.
 - Agreed, achievable goals together with practical suggestions for their attainment and an outline of any suitable, available resources should be set.
 - An agreed definite time frame for improvement should be determined.
 - Assistance and resources available to assist the Trainee should be identified and offered.
 - An agreed definite time frame for the Trainee to access such assistance and resources should be determined.
 - An action plan including follow up meeting dates should be documented.
 - The Tutor should organise individualised learning experiences if appropriate to assist with difficulties with examination preparation or presentation technique, acquisition of clinical skills or interpersonal skills development. The Trainee has a responsibility to actively participate in these activities.
 - The College should be informed of all the above.

6. UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS

If a satisfactory resolution cannot be achieved using the provisions of this document, further assessment will be undertaken by the College.

SERIOUS ISSUES: PROFESSIONAL MISCONDUCT OR A RISK TO PATIENT SAFETY

Disciplinary action in respect of employment or medical registration is a matter for the employer or the Medical Council if there is evidence of serious breaches of care. It may be appropriate (or required) for the Head of Department to report the matter to the Medical Council. Additional assistance and support may be available through these bodies. Any disciplinary action (especially dismissal) requires due process to be followed.