

The Draft National Whistleblowing Standards

Part 10

Arrangements for students

May 2019

Student access to the Standards and the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO)

1. Students working and/or studying within NHS services must have access to these Standards; they must be able speak out by raising concerns over patient safety or malpractice, and they must have access to the support they need to do so.
2. Students are often at specific risk of detriment during placements, as they will be relying on managers and mentors for assessment and grading. They may be deterred from raising concerns if they feel this would impact on their marks, and this concern must be taken into consideration when responding to concerns raised by students.
3. During their training, most students will be informed of what whistleblowing means and how raising concerns provides an important mechanism for service improvements. Some will also be informed of the duty they will have to raise concerns, once they are registered professionals. Their confidence in putting this into practice will vary, depending on a range of factors, including their previous placements and the culture they experience around them where they are working.

Students raising concerns within NHS services

4. Students working in an NHS setting should be encouraged to participate fully in the organisation's learning culture and should be encouraged to use the systems available to all regular members of staff to raise concerns.
5. They must have access to information and advice from all the same sources as other staff within the service, including:
 - 5.1. National Alert Line – 0800 008 6112 or alertline@protect-advice.org.uk;
 - 5.2. The Board's confidential contact for raising concerns, or other confidential speak up contact;
 - 5.3. The INWO;
 - 5.4. Professional bodies;
 - 5.5. University representatives for students;
6. They must also be able to raise concerns with:
 - 6.1. A service manager or team leader;
 - 6.2. A more senior manager if circumstances mean this is more appropriate;
 - 6.3. A university representative (see below for details); or

- 6.4. A confidential contact for raising concerns (in some places there may also be speak up ambassadors or advocates).
7. All NHS Boards and service providers must be open to receiving concerns either directly from a student, or through a representative from their course.

Students raising concerns through course advocates

8. In addition to the routes normally available to staff, students can also raise their concerns with a representative on their course. It may be that information and advice is enough for the student to then raise the concern within the service. However, if this is not felt appropriate in the circumstances, or if the student does not feel confident that this would achieve the right outcomes for them, they must be able to raise their concern through their course representative or 'course advocate'.
9. Each course that provides placements or work experience in NHS services must have a named person (such as the course coordinator), who can act as an advocate, and take the concern to the Board or primary care service on their behalf. This person must be fully aware of these Standards, what students can expect when they raise a concern, and who to contact in each of the Boards where their students work, in case any concerns are raised.
10. The course advocate must provide information and advice to students, and discuss the implications of raising the concern either directly or through the advocate. This discussion must include:
 - 10.1. Consideration of confidentiality issues;
 - 10.2. Support available to the student and how to access it; and
 - 10.3. Details of the procedure and what to expect.
11. If a student decides not to raise a concern directly themselves, but instead uses their course advocate to raise the concern on their behalf, the student must remain anonymous to the Board or service provider, and all communication must go through the course advocate. This includes enquiries for further information, updates and a final response at the end of the process.

Recording student concerns

12. Student concerns should be recorded in the same way as any other concerns. Detailed information about what to record is available in Part 6 of these Standards.
13. For concerns that are raised by a course advocate rather than by the student, the record should indicate the role of the person bringing the concern, as well as their full contact details, and information about the concern being raised. The

name, contact details or any other personal details (including course details) of the student must not be recorded, as this could put them at risk of detriment.

Support for the student

14. Students raising concerns must have access to the same support as staff do in relation to raising concerns. Their course advocate will be able to provide some support in person. The advocate is also be expected to be able to advise on support options provided by the Board or service provider. This may, on occasion, mean making special arrangements to ensure access, for example, to counselling which would normally be provided through an employee assistance scheme.

Signposting to the INWO

15. The final decision provided by the NHS service on any concern raised with them must include signposting to the INWO. This applies equally to student concerns, and course advocates must take responsibility for passing on this information to the students concerned.