

Bullying and harassment

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There is good evidence that disruptive behaviour, inappropriate behaviour and harassment occurs in the medical workplace. A New Zealand study reported that 50% of house officers and registrars had experienced at least one episode of bullying behaviour during their previous three or sixth-month clinical attachment.¹ An Australian study found that 50% of junior doctors had been bullied in their workplace.²

International research has shown that bullying in the healthcare profession is not associated with specialty or sex; it appears that bullying is endemic and occurs across all specialties and at all levels of seniority although it is fair to say that where bullying occurs it is more common to be by a more senior employee over a more junior one.³ Examples of bullying, could be a registrar that bullies a medical student or a charge nurse that bullies an enrolled nurse.⁴

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) has prepared a resource on this providing further advice to our members.

Position statement

The NZMA does not condone bullying or harassment under any circumstances. It further believes that raising awareness of inappropriate behaviour, disruptive behaviour and harassment in the medical profession is an important step in the process of eliminating the problem. The NZMA encourages medical schools, doctors' employers, and the medical colleges to have their own anti-bullying/harassment policy. Such a policy should include the following:

- acknowledgement that bullying and harassment may occur in their organisation
- a statement that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated and a commitment to eradicating institutional/workplace bullying and harassment
- steps that will be taken to prevent bullying and harassment
- clarification of responsibilities of staff/supervisors and employees/students
- grievance, investigation and disciplinary procedures with an opportunity to respond to any investigation or report
- help services for those involved, including those breaching these policies
- clear guidelines for the protection of confidentiality and ensuring those who report inappropriate behaviour are protected
- training for staff in recognising and dealing with instances of bullying and harassment
- implementation, review and monitoring of the policy.

¹ Scott J, Blanshard C, Child S. Workplace bullying of junior doctors: a cross sectional questionnaire survey. *NZMJ* 2008;121(1282):10-15.

² Rutherford A, Rissel C. A survey of workplace bullying in a health sector organisation. *Aust Health Rev* 2005;28(1):65-72.

³ Workplace bullying in NHS community trust: staff questionnaire survey" Quine, L, *BMJ* 1999;318:228-232 (23 January)

⁴ <https://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/117-1204/1125/>