

A protocol for external clinical advisory team visits

Responsible College Officer: Honorary Secretary

In the event of a request from NHS Regions, NHS Trusts, from the Medical Director or Chief Executive or other responsible body:

Initial Contact and Preliminaries

1. The initial contact is usually through the Honorary Secretary. A brief outline of the problem is usually discussed by telephone and then obtained in writing.
2. The details of the situation are established and whether local resolution has been fully explored. This is documented briefly for file.
3. If thought suitable for College assistance, considerations for person specification of the assessors are agreed. A decision is made as to whether other Colleges or professional bodies should be involved. The Trust should inform the NCAA if an individual doctor is being investigated.
4. The cost of the visit is established, which include travel, subsistence and fees for the assessors. At present no charge is made for the costs incurred by the College.
5. Outline terms of reference and timetable for the visit are agreed.
6. Usually, 2 appropriate Fellows are selected. In due course, one will be a trained assessor and the other matched for the special considerations of the case. The College Specialty Advisory Committee chairs may be involved in selection of specialist assessors.
7. Assessors must sign a declaration that they have no conflicts of interest nor are there any investigations/legal action to which they may themselves be subject.
8. The Honorary Secretary sends the Trust and the assessors copies of the legal indemnity form that must be signed by the Trust. Assessors are reminded to ensure that their own medical defence society subscription is up to date.
9. The ownership and circulation of report is agreed. The report is owned by the requesting Trust. Any action taken, or not taken, as a result is the responsibility of the Trust. The College does not keep a copy but requests a summary of the conclusion of the visit. Neither the report nor any of its contents are circulated beyond the agreed stakeholders.
10. Thereafter all communication is between the assessor and the Trust.
11. The College should send a letter to the individual under investigation explaining the process, the general terms of reference and the identity of the assessors. The letter should ensure that the member is aware of the support available from appropriate institutions such as the BMA and in future we aim to offer personal support from a College mentor.

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Duties of Assessor

The Visit

1. Agree detailed terms of reference with the Trust. Ensure that these are also sent to the clinician being investigated as it is preferable, but not essential, that these are agreed by them also. Ensure indemnity form is signed by the Trust and fees agreed.
2. Obtain additional written information where relevant. Consider other information that may be available such as outcome of College training or service visits.
3. Set an agenda and timetable for the visit. Identify who will be interviewed and whether it is necessary to visit facilities in the hospital. Agree to send notes of the individual interview to the interviewee for factual correction.
4. Agree in advance whether notes taken by the assessors will be copied for the report or whether they are purely for their own use.
5. During the visit, attempt to work to an agreed agenda but be open to suggestions of other people to be interviewed to give a complete sense of fairness.
6. Carry out the visit in an informal, non-threatening way.
7. Interviewees should be offered the opportunity to have a friend or BMA representative present. It is not appropriate to have legal representation.

The Report

1. Prepare the report within the agreed timescale and check with Trust for factual inaccuracies.
2. If several visitors involved, agree report by all members of the team. Sign final copy.
3. Send the report to agreed recipients.
4. Inform Honorary Secretary of completion and any residual concerns.

Duties of Honorary Secretary

Follow-up

1. Ensure that all papers relating to the visit are properly and securely filed.
2. After an appropriate interval, contact the Trust to establish whether the problem has been resolved.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the College's intervention and write up any lessons to be learned.

4. Offer further help or support to the individual investigated.

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