

MEDICAL PROTECTION SOCIETY
PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND EXPERT ADVICE

MPS



Putting members **first**

The MPS guide for medical students

www.medicalprotection.org/ireland

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Important – please note

Due to the dynamic nature of medical law we suggest that you access our website at www.medicalprotection.org/ireland for the most up-to-date information. February 2015.

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This booklet was produced with medical students in mind. It is intended to offer general guidance to help them circumvent the commonest pitfalls encountered whilst at medical school. MPS members are always welcome to telephone our medicolegal advice line +44 113 241 0200 for more specific practical advice and support.

MPS is the world's leading protection organisation for doctors, dentists and healthcare professionals. We protect and support the professional interests of more than 290,000 members around the world. Our benefits include access to indemnity, expert advice and peace of mind. Highly qualified advisers are on hand to talk through a question or concern at any time.

Our in-house experts assist with the wide range of legal and ethical problems that arise from professional practice. This includes clinical negligence claims, complaints, medical and dental council inquiries, legal and ethical dilemmas, disciplinary procedures, inquests and fatal accident inquiries.

Our philosophy is to support safe practice in medicine and dentistry by helping to avert problems in the first place. We do this by promoting risk management through our workshops, E-learning, clinical risk assessments, publications, conferences, lectures and presentations.

MPS is not an insurance company. All the benefits of membership of MPS are discretionary as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Introduction

Welcome to MPS's membership guide for medical students, and congratulations on beginning medical school! Most doctors look back fondly on their student years as a time of excitement, freedom, new challenges and experiences. There are also pressures to contend with and of course, a lot of hard work ahead.

MPS can support you through the highs and lows with free student membership. This includes a helpline for any membership-related matters, free revision resources, discounts on textbooks and free elective protection. As a membership organisation, one of MPS's primary aims is to provide education on medicolegal issues for medical students and doctors. We promote safer clinical practice, to the benefit of both members and patients.

The days when you might have to worry about making a mistake that harms a patient probably seem a long way off. However, as a medical student, you are at the start of a career that brings with it many responsibilities and privileges – from now on you will be seen as a role model for your profession. A serious mistake in your academic or personal life could damage your career before it even begins. Our section on ethical standards and behaviour for medical students, which starts on page 12, outlines what the Medical Council expects from students and the potential pitfalls, and how to avoid them.

We want you to enjoy your student years, and remember that if you don't know what to do, or feel under pressure, ask for help. This will stand you in good stead throughout a rewarding, demanding, sometimes exhausting, and at other times exhilarating career!

Finally, remember that MPS isn't just here for you when things go wrong – we provide a range of support through study materials and risk management tools, which are outlined in this booklet. For up-to-date information please go to our website at **www.medicalprotection.org**.



The benefits of MPS membership

MPS is the world's leading medical indemnity provider. We support and advise students, doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals around the world on a range of medicolegal issues.

We have more than 290,000 members worldwide, and 86% of medical students currently studying in Ireland are members of MPS.

Putting medical students first

MPS is here for you from your first day at medical school until the day you graduate, and throughout your career.

Remember MPS is not only here for you when things go wrong – we have a whole host of educational benefits that will aid you through your studies, which are highlighted in this booklet.

Our specialised student team is here to help with any queries you may have about your membership:

Phone: 1800 509 441 (Calls to Membership Services may be recorded for monitoring and training purposes)

Fax: +44 113 241 0500

Email: irishstudent@mps.org.uk

My MPS

As a member of MPS you have access to your personal membership account at any time. All you need to do is register at **www.medicalprotection.org/ireland/my-mps**



Frequently asked questions

Q. What does MPS do?

A. MPS aims to help doctors with ethical and legal problems that arise from their clinical practice.

Q. How is MPS relevant to me as a student?

A. As a student member of MPS you have access to all the following benefits:

- Free OSCE revision resources
- Free e-learning modules
- Case reports/booklets/factsheets on medicolegal issues
- Regular issues of *Casebook* – the journal of MPS
- Exclusive book discounts
- Free worldwide elective protection
- 24-hour medicolegal advice line.



Discounts

15% discount on all medical books for MPS members!

MPS has teamed up with WisePress Online Medical Bookshop to offer our members a fantastic 15% discount on medical titles from all these major publishing companies:

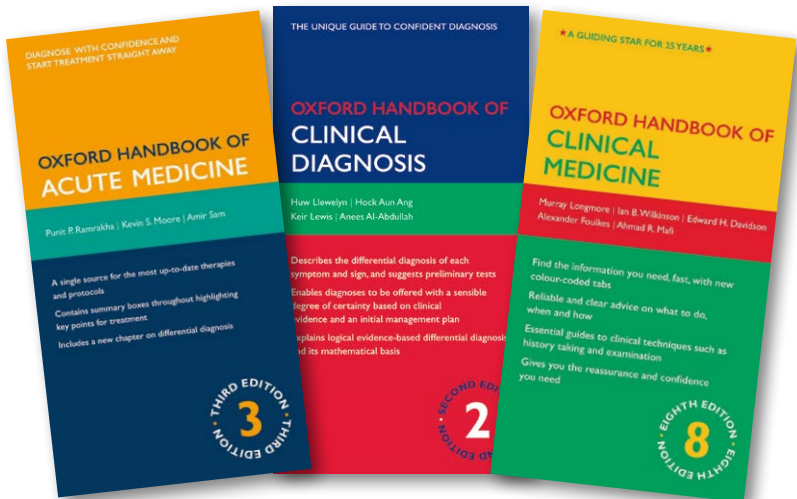
- Cambridge University Press
- Elsevier Health Sciences
- Health Press
- Hodder Arnold
- Lippincott Williams and Wilkins
- Oxford University Press
- Radcliffe Publishing
- Springer
- Thieme
- Wiley-Blackwell

And many more – see www.medicalprotection.org/ireland/students/discounts for more details.

25% off Oxford University Press core titles

MPS members are entitled to receive a 25% discount on around 2,000 medical titles as part of the OUP core titles series. All titles have been written and edited by internationally renowned practitioners.

See www.medicalprotection.org/ireland/students/discounts for more details.





Facebook

The MPS student Facebook page is a central place for student members to come together and share tips and advice as they go through their medical training. The page also offers free OSCE revision, monthly podcasts, a case report of the week, upcoming event information and offers and discounts on textbooks.

You can access all the benefits of MPS membership here, including MPS publications, OSCE revision resources, information about elective protection, book discounts and medicolegal advice. Membership of MPS is free to students, and these pages are another way we can support you in your studies and keep in touch during your time at medical school.

However, all good medicine comes with a warning on the packet, so please use Facebook sensibly. MPS emphasises to students that a career in medicine brings with it privilege and responsibility – and this applies online as much as in 'real life'.

Please see our section on social media on page 16 for more advice and information about using Facebook during your studies. We hope you find our Facebook page helpful and informative, and a good addition to your study materials.

www.facebook.com/mpsmedicalstudent



E-learning

MPS's E-learning platform, Prism, provides you with access to interactive case reports in core medicolegal and risk management areas, and is available free of charge as a benefit of membership.

You can browse through a range of courses and modules – just select the ones you are interested in, and complete them at a time that suits you. After finishing a course, you will be able to download a certificate to prove how many hours of learning you have accumulated.

All content has been created by medicolegal experts and will assist you in minimising your exposure to complaints and increase patient safety.

www.medicalprotection.org/ireland/education-and-events/online-learning

What's inside...

FEATURES



CASE REPORTS



FEATURES



CASE REPORTS



05 Guiding you through the claims process

Following your feedback, MPS has launched a new way of supporting you if you receive a clinical negligence claim. MPS medicolegal adviser Dr Sam Godwin explains what the changes mean.

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MPS's position on wilful

10 The story of Beth Bowen

In 2007, Clare Bowen's five-year-old daughter Beth died during surgery at a hospital in the UK. Here she tells her story to Sara Dawson – and relays her hopes that it will reduce the likelihood of such an incident happening again.

13 From the case files

Dr Mark Dinwoodie, head of member education at MPS, looks at what can be

CASE REPORTS

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Publications

What you can receive now:

Casebook

Students receive a digital version of MPS's highly rated member journal, *Casebook*. The printed version is available to MPS student members from year four upwards.

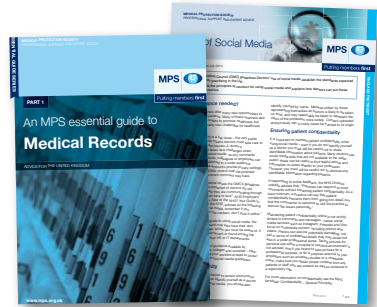
Each issue is full of case reports, medicolegal news and thought-provoking features.

Casebook consistently meets with high praise from MPS members at all stages of their training and careers, and frequently sparks debate and discussion within the medicolegal field.



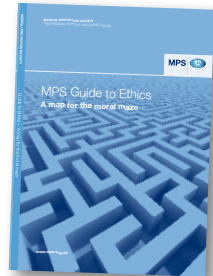
Booklets and factsheets

Advice on a variety of medicolegal subjects is available on the MPS website. You can download a range of comprehensive booklets and factsheets on topics such as consent, report writing and safe prescribing. Use them as an aid to your revision or to accompany your teaching sessions.



Ethics guide

The *MPS Guide to Ethics – A Map for the Moral Maze* is a resource for students and those who teach them, looking at the ethical principles that frame modern healthcare. The booklet focuses on the practical consequences of ethical dilemmas that clinicians face on a daily basis.



What you can receive later on in your training:

Preparing for your Intern Post

This guide aims to help trainee medics prepare to face the wards as doctors. It draws on the real-life experiences of other doctors and the expertise of risk management professionals, to help new doctors navigate the more common medicolegal issues they will encounter. It also includes advice on the next key stage of a medical career, with a snapshot of some of the different career paths available.



Avoiding easy mistakes: Five medicolegal hazards for interns and SHOs

Many doctors are unsure about how medicine and law interact; this may reflect a lack of teaching in medical school or a lack of understanding of how medicolegal principles translate into practice. This booklet takes you through five of the top medicolegal hazards for doctors, and includes examples of how problems can arise in practice.



Medical students: Expected ethical standards and behaviour

1. Good medical practice
2. Personal conduct
3. Social media
4. You and colleagues
5. You and your patients
6. Your work
7. Your health

Congratulations... and a word of caution

Congratulations on starting your career in medicine!

As a doctor, lives will be in your hands – the consequences of a medical mistake can be very serious. It's this responsibility and challenge, combined with the exhilarating and sometimes terrifying prospect of patients trusting you with their health, which draws thousands of students to medical school every year and makes competition for places so fierce.

You have worked hard to get here, so we hope this guide will help you to build on your success and to enjoy your career in medicine. Fear of making a mistake shouldn't deter you from your aim of becoming a good doctor – even experienced medics can slip up. However, what may be less obvious is that a serious mistake in your academic or personal life could harm your prospects before you've even qualified.

The Medical Council, which is responsible for registering and regulating doctors, takes honesty, integrity and appropriate behaviour very seriously. Combined with the reputed 'work hard, play hard' culture of life as a medic, and the tough academic pressures of the course, it's perhaps not surprising that MPS hears from many students who are worried they may have got into difficulties.

In this section, we look at the main areas where mistakes can be made, and how to avoid things going wrong. As we outline in our introduction to this guide, as a student you are already seen as a role model for the medical profession, with the responsibility and privilege that brings. This applies online as much as in 'real life', and we explain how to stay safe when using social networking sites and online forums.

MPS provides advice and guidance for students on how to avoid situations that could affect your career or your future as a doctor. If you are struggling with your work, or think your health may be affecting your studies, do talk to someone, and let your medical school know, before things escalate.

If you are having difficulty with a medicolegal issue, our experienced advisers are available by phone or email.

For more information, phone us on **1800 509 441**, email irishstudent@mps.org.uk or visit www.medicalprotection.org/ireland/students.



1. Good medical practice

Medicine is a continuous process of learning. As a doctor, you will be assessed throughout your career and be expected to keep up-to-date with the knowledge and skills required for good clinical care.

This process begins at medical school, where you are responsible for your own learning and need to be aware of the latest guidelines on standards of practice.

The Medical Council has produced a leaflet, *Guidelines for Medical Schools on Ethical Standards and Behaviour Appropriate for Medical Students*, which states that a high standard of behaviour is expected from students, as they have contact with patients in hospital and primary and community-based settings.

As a medical student, you are expected to:

- Attend compulsory teaching sessions
- Complete and submit coursework on time
- Show respect for the knowledge and skills of those involved in your education
- Reflect on feedback and respond constructively
- Make sure you can be contacted and respond to messages.



Survival tips

- If you are struggling with your studies, speak to a tutor sooner rather than later. It's better to ask for help before things get worse.
- Let someone know if you are ill and cannot attend teaching or clinical sessions, or if you are being affected by a major life event which may impact on your studies, eg, a bereavement.
- Recognising your own limitations is the key principle behind competency. When providing care, you must work within your own competency, and ask for advice if you feel out of your depth.

2. Personal conduct

The Medical Council takes probity very seriously. Probity means being honest, trustworthy and acting with integrity, which is at the heart of medical professionalism, and equally important for students as for qualified doctors.

You could be the most brilliant student of your year, but your hard work could be in vain if your conduct raises concerns about your professionalism. As a student, you are not subject to Medical Council Fitness to Practise procedures, however, even a single incident, if serious enough, could harm your chances of obtaining registration. Therefore, you should conduct yourself in a way which is appropriate for a future medical practitioner.

Examples of things which will concern the Medical Council include: alcohol misuse affecting clinical work, misuse of drugs (even if there are no legal proceedings), drink driving, bullying and physical violence.



Survival tips

- Own up to your mistakes – it is your responsibility to ensure you discharge any obligation in respect to probity in completing an application to medical school or employment.
- As a student member, you have access to MPS's advice line, including our emergency service outside normal hours. Let MPS know as soon as you think you may be in trouble, and our experienced advisers can give you confidential, professional information on what to do next.
- Do not let your personal or religious beliefs affect your clinical work. Medical Council guidance is that medical students should make care of their patients their first concern.



3. Social media

In today's media-driven society, the boundaries between private and professional life are becoming increasingly blurred. In such a fast-moving environment, it's all too easy to forget that the advice about personal behaviour and patient confidentiality applies equally online.

The Medical Council states that students should never discuss individual patients – or partners, relatives and friends of patients – even anonymously, within earshot of the general public. Of course, such discussion extends to the virtual world, and the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, chat rooms, and texts and emails. It is inappropriate to post informal, personal or derogatory comments about patients or colleagues on public internet forums.

The crucial thing to remember when interacting with medical blogs and social networking sites, or when taking part in forum discussions, is that anonymity is a myth. You should write everything as if you are signing it with your name. When posting online, bear in mind who could be reading what you write. Unguarded comments about patients, your lecturers or fellow students could lead to disciplinary action by your medical school, or, if qualified, the Medical Council.

Beware of jokes or activities that can seem like harmless fun online, but could backfire in reality. In 2009, seven doctors and nurses were suspended from duty at Great Western Hospital in Swindon, UK, after taking part in the Facebook craze – the Lying Down Game. The staff on the night shift took turns to photograph themselves on ward floors, resuscitation trolleys and on the building's helipad. The pictures featured on a Facebook page called the Secret Swindon Emergency Department. Their employers were concerned that those involved had breached health and safety and infection control regulations, so they were suspended and faced disciplinary action. Of course, media interest also had a negative effect on the reputation of the hospital and the professions involved.



Survival tips

- Be aware that defamation law applies to comments posted online. You could face trouble if you harm someone's reputation by publishing incorrect or potentially damaging information.
- Use privacy settings on social networking sites where available – but be aware that not all information can be protected on the web.
- Do not accept Facebook 'friend' requests from patients. It's too easy for the doctor–patient boundary to become blurred.
- Avoid behaviour that might affect your future career or reputation as a doctor, eg, excessive drinking, drugs – and certainly don't publicise such behaviour online.



Scenario

Sean, a fourth year medical student, chose to complete a module in the Emergency Department. He was working one Friday night when a young female patient was brought in by two of her friends, having had a fit in a local pub. Sean took a history from the patient, and realised that she was a first year geography student at the same university. Sean visited her the following day on the medical ward to follow up on her medical management. They seemed to get on well, so Sean invited her to be a friend on Facebook. After a while, the relationship soured, and the patient complained to the medical school about Sean's conduct in contacting her and starting a relationship as a result of meeting her as a patient.



Learning points

As a student, professional boundaries may seem blurred. Students may feel that, since they are not the professional caring for a patient, the limits around personal relationships do not apply. However, the Medical Council is clear that you should: "Never abuse a patient's trust, eg, by establishing an improper personal, financial or sexual relationship with a patient or with their close relatives." Think about how you might handle situations like the one above. If you have any concerns, discuss these with your consultant or clinical supervisor.

4. You and colleagues

Good doctors are good communicators – it's that simple.

The more traditional “communication skills” teaching has focused on the doctor–patient relationship, yet communication between colleagues in hospital and primary care settings is equally important.

MPS's experience over many years is that some of the biggest mistakes in hospitals are the result of poor communication. Although there are often many factors leading to adverse outcomes, it is undoubtedly the case that poor communication and handover can result in inappropriate prescriptions, incorrect diagnoses and patients lost to follow-up. These have clear potential for patient harm, and an associated impact on the team arising from complaints, claims and disciplinary investigations.

Developing both your teamwork and communication skills at medical school will stand you in good stead as a doctor.

The Medical Council states that in interactions with colleagues (including academic staff, healthcare and administrative staff) you should:

- Behave in a courteous and professional way
- Recognise and respect the contribution of all staff
- Work together with colleagues in a way that best serves patients' interests.

Communicating well in a team demands more than merely listening and passing on messages. Doctors must work within their competence, seeking advice and assistance from senior clinical colleagues where appropriate.

On occasion, doctors may need to act to protect patients from potential harm caused by inadequate systems or procedures, or as a result of a colleague's behaviour, performance or health. MPS recognises that this is never an easy decision. If you need advice on the appropriate action to take, you should usually raise this with your educational supervisor and you can always access expert medicolegal advice via MPS's helpline.



Survival tips

- You may feel as if you are at the bottom of a long chain – but in fact you are part of a wide communication network within primary and secondary care, including the voluntary and social sectors. Try to think about your individual role – what information should you convey to assist in protecting the patient's health?
- As a student, the Medical Council expects you to demonstrate that you are developing teamwork and leadership skills. Be willing to work as a team and take on appropriate responsibility.
- However, never work outside your competence, or recommend medical treatment or any particular action that might be interpreted by patients or others as medical advice. If in doubt, always ask.

- If you are concerned about a fellow student, colleague or other health worker, raise your concerns with the appropriate person – this is usually your educational supervisor, consultant or GP trainer.
- If an adverse incident occurs, you must inform your supervisor without delay.



Scenario

Niamh, a final year medical student, was on her elective in South Africa. She had always wanted to pursue a career in emergency medicine, and had arranged a placement in the trauma unit at a major hospital in Cape Town. Before leaving Ireland, Niamh had read up on advanced trauma life support techniques and had spent time in her local emergency department.

One evening whilst on call, a number of patients were brought to the department following a road traffic accident involving a minibus and a lorry. Four patients were multiply injured, requiring immediate resuscitation. The two registrars in the department led the assessment of the patients. Niamh was one of three medical students in the department and assisted in the management of one young female, obtaining venous access and taking blood.

After the initial assessment of the patient, it became clear that she would require a chest drain. The registrar asked Niamh if she would insert the drain whilst he continued to attend to other patients. Niamh had never performed a chest drain but had seen it done once before. She agreed to perform the drain, not wanting to pass up the opportunity.

After making a skin incision with a scalpel, Niamh struggled to insert the drain. Niamh applied more and more pressure, but was unable to force the drain through the chest wall. She tried to cut through the intercostal musculature with the scalpel, inadvertently causing the patient to bleed. Fortunately, the nurse recognised that Niamh was out of her depth, and called the registrar urgently.

Having witnessed these events, another medical student expressed concern to her personal tutor and Niamh was disciplined by the medical school on her return home.



Learning points

An elective period is often a hugely rewarding experience, and students will often find themselves practising medicine in a very different setting to that of their university's teaching hospitals.

Whilst it can be tempting to gain new clinical experiences, and other healthcare staff may be grateful for your assistance, your patients' safety must always be your primary concern. Working within your competence, or training within an appropriate environment supported by senior colleagues, will ensure maximum benefit for both you and your patients.

Remember that MPS offers free elective protection and has a network of medicolegal advisers around the world. For more information on MPS's free elective protection see www.medicalprotection.org/Ireland/students/electives.

5. You and your patients

Consent and respect

Patients, especially when sick, anxious or distressed, will not necessarily be in a position to differentiate between you, as a medical student, and a 'real' doctor – so it's up to you to make sure they know who you are.

The Medical Council advises that patients must give informed consent to take part in teaching or research. It can be tough when doctors introduce you to patients simply as a 'colleague', but it is important that you identify yourself as a medical student and check that patients are aware of your role. Wear a name/identity badge at all times during your clinical practice. Respect the right of a patient to decline to be seen by a medical student.

The Medical Council also says you should respect patients and treat them with dignity. Address adult patients formally, using their title and surname, unless invited by the patient to do otherwise.

Presenting yourself professionally, dressing appropriately, and being punctual, smart and alert are simple but important ways of showing patients and colleagues that you care. Be aware of and respect cultural differences in dress and presentation and adhere to the highest standards of personal hygiene.

Try to be aware of your body language, and take every opportunity to develop your skills of empathy. Don't forget about relatives and those close to the patient, who should also be treated with consideration and offered support when needed.

Confidentiality

It might seem obvious that patients' health information must be kept confidential, but what may be less obvious is that this duty of confidentiality applies to all the information you hold about them. This includes dates or times of appointments they've attended, or even the fact they are registered with a certain practice or have attended a certain hospital. It can be easy to 'let your guard down', particularly when away from the clinical setting, or out with friends.

Remember that discussing clinical care in public may appear unprofessional and give the impression of breaching confidentiality, even if patients' names are not used.



Survival tips

- Take care to avoid breaking patient confidentiality unintentionally, for example by ensuring consultations with patients cannot be overheard.

- Be aware of high-risk situations and places where confidentiality is easily breached, eg, computer screens, printers, and conversations in canteens, corridors and lifts.
- Memory sticks and other electronic storage devices are a particular problem – make sure you know and follow your medical school policy, especially about encryption and the use of such devices.
- Bear in mind that even if you are clearly identified as a student, patients may see you as being in a position of responsibility and attach added importance to your opinions or comments.
- The Medical Council states that academic work should not identify the patient if it is to be seen outside the patient's care team. This includes case or log reports that are submitted as part of the student's coursework or assessment.



Scenario

Niall, a fourth year medical student, was completing a placement in an inner-city general practice. He was asked to take a history and examine a female patient in her early 30s, who had presented with upper respiratory symptoms of a few days' duration. He took a full history, examined the patient's chest, ears, nose and throat, and presented the case to the GP.

The day after the consultation, Niall was contacted by the GP practice. The patient had complained about an inappropriate examination being performed. As part of their investigation, they required a written statement from Niall. The medical school was also involved, and Niall was told that he would not be allowed to undertake clinical work until the investigation had concluded.

Fortunately, Niall had kept clear records of the consultation, including documentation of the respiratory and ENT examinations that he had performed. With MPS's assistance, Niall was able to provide a written statement that satisfied the practice and the medical school of the proper nature of the examination. It appeared that the patient had misinterpreted his examination of the lymph nodes in her neck and axillae as being something more sinister. Niall was allowed back to the practice two weeks later, and was successfully signed off for the placement despite the time out.



Learning points

This case highlights the need for good communication with patients, who might genuinely misunderstand the purpose of an examination, particularly when a medical student performs it differently to a more experienced clinician. Clear documentation of the consultation and examination will help to provide evidence where concerns arise. However, all doctors and students should consider the need for chaperones, even if no intimate examination is performed.



6. Your work

The Medical Council expects medical students to be honest and trustworthy both personally and professionally. This also applies equally to academic work.

Copying others' work and passing it off as your own is clearly wrong, but many medics have been tempted to take 'short cuts' when under the pressure of large workloads, high competition and tight deadlines.

However pressured you feel, remember that plagiarism and falsifying data is completely unacceptable. Make sure you include references for any quotes or information gained from other publications or authors. Be especially careful when using material sourced online – although the information may appear to be freely available, you must reference everything that is not your original work.

Even a single episode of plagiarism or dishonesty, for example in CVs and applications, could harm your future career and land you in trouble with the Medical Council. Employers will consider dishonesty on an application form as a disciplinary matter, which may ultimately lead to termination of a doctor's contract of employment.



Survival tips

- You must be honest about your experience and qualifications when applying for posts.
- You should bring to the attention of your medical school any mistakes or concerns about your own work, and take action if you think someone else may be acting dishonestly.



Scenario

Philip and Ben were medical students in the fourth year of their studies. They were attached to the gynaecological oncology firm at the main teaching hospital in their city. Since the firm's intern and registrar were both away, the students had been asked to assist with the operating list the following day. They had both been told to read up on the procedures before the list. The afternoon before, Ben and Philip asked their consultant's secretary to print off copies of the theatre list before catching the bus home. Excited by the prospect of assisting, the two students discussed the operations that they would see the following day. They were so engrossed in their conversation that they almost missed their stop. In the ensuing rush to disembark, Ben dropped his copy of the list. Following a complaint from a passenger on the bus, an investigation was launched by the hospital and medical school.



Learning points

Whilst it is important to be enthusiastic and to prepare properly for any learning opportunity, such as a theatre list or clinic, be careful where you discuss patients, procedures that you have been involved with, or conditions that you have seen. Most hospitals have strict policies surrounding the distribution and use of theatre lists or other documents that include patients' information. Be careful that you do not inadvertently breach these. Generally, patient notes or other records should not be removed unless specifically authorised. If in doubt, don't remove any patient identifiable information from the hospital ward or department concerned.



7. Your health

You have probably heard the biblical proverb “physician, heal thyself”. However, Medical Council guidance is clear that you should not try and assess your own health, or rely on another student’s or colleague’s assessment.

Doctors are notorious for being poor at looking after their own health. However, staying well is important for both you and your patients, so get into good habits while you’re at medical school, and avoid putting patients at risk.

It’s important both to seek independent and objective advice about your own health. Register with a GP and ask for advice from your doctor or occupational health department at university – or both, if you are worried about your health. This includes mental health as well as physical.

Medicine is a stressful career, and this can begin at medical school. The first advice for dealing with stress is to get help early. Being unaware of the depth of the problem can cause it to escalate and lead to more serious issues such as depression, or drug or alcohol dependency.



Survival tips

- Protect patients, colleagues and yourself by being immunised appropriately.
- Disclose to an appropriate academic or clinical adviser if you have a relevant long-term medical condition or disability (eg, epilepsy, diabetes, severe allergies).
- Never consume alcohol or recreational drugs (legal or illegal) at a time when it could impair your reason or judgment, or otherwise impact on your professional responsibilities.
- Be aware that after graduating you are responsible for informing your employer of any health issues.



Scenario

Fawad was a second year medical student on a graduate course. He had previously completed an English degree at TCD and had always been something of a high flyer. Fawad found the first year at medical school somewhat different, struggling to adapt to the more scientific way of thinking and making few friends. In the lead-up to the summer exams, he had become increasingly irritable and withdrawn. Fawad's GP diagnosed him with depression and referred him for cognitive behavioural therapy. Despite this help, Fawad began to drink heavily, and his attendance at lectures and tutorials started to suffer. His pastoral tutor asked Fawad to meet with him, but he missed several appointments.

Towards the end of the first semester, Fawad was called to attend a formal interview with the Dean of the medical school. Unfortunately, he turned up smelling of alcohol, giving the excuse of having been at the pub with friends. As a result of ongoing concerns, disciplinary action was instigated at the medical school. MPS was able to show that Fawad's poor attendance and apparent attitude problems related to an underlying health issue. Fawad acknowledged that he had an issue with alcohol and depression, and the medical school allowed him to take a break from his studies and provided him with help and support via occupational health.



Learning points

Health issues can arise at any time in your medical career, from the early days at university to the final years of clinical work. It is always important to seek help – the sooner the better. MPS offers support and advice, via our team of expert medicolegal advisers, and through access to a confidential, independent counselling service. Sometimes things can get out of hand, and occasionally formal investigations or procedures will be the first occasion that health issues come to light. Even at this stage, as the above scenario shows, getting appropriate advice and support can help to get your health and career back on track.

Further information

- Medical Council, *Guidelines for Medical Schools on Ethical Standards and Behaviour Appropriate for Medical Students*
- Medical Council, *Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners* (2009) www.medicalcouncil.ie

Notes

33 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0PS
Victoria House, 2 Victoria Place, Leeds LS11 5AE
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Student enquiries

T 1800 509 441 (toll-free within Ireland)
F +44 113 241 0500 (UK)
E irishstudent@mps.org.uk

Medicolegal enquiries

T +44 113 241 0200 (UK)
F +44 113 241 0500 (UK)
E querydoc@mps.org.uk

Please direct all comments, questions or suggestions about MPS service, policy and operations to:

Chief Executive

Medical Protection Society
33 Cavendish Square,
London W1G 0PS, United Kingdom

chief.executive@mps.org.uk

In the interests of confidentiality please do not include information in any email that would allow a patient to be identified.

The Medical Protection Society

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