

# GUIDE TO STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR AND COMPLAINT RESOLUTION FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY IN THE CLINICAL SETTING

## • 1. Preamble

1.1 The Undergraduate MD Program at McMaster University is committed to excellence in the teaching of Professional Skills to medical students. As students progress through their clinical training, they will develop effective communication with patients and colleagues, clinical competence, and respect for the dignity of patients and colleagues and allied health professionals. These professional behaviours will be role-modelled by all physicians who are involved in the education, observation, assessment and supervision of medical students.

1.2 The intent of this document is to outline the professional behaviour standards of the MD Program at McMaster University and to set out courses of action for complaint resolution.

## • 2. Standards of Professional Behaviour for Students and Teaching Faculty

2.1 McMaster University affirms the right of every member of its constituencies to live, study and work in an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment including sexual harassment. Discrimination and harassment are incompatible with standards of professional ethics and with behaviour appropriate to an institution of higher learning. To that end, McMaster University has developed Sexual Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policies.

2.2 Standards for professional behaviour in the clinical arena for medical students and clinical preceptors that are described in the MD Program General Guide are similar to, but do not replace, the legal and ethical standards set forth in law, the standards set by such other bodies as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) or the Canadian Medical Association, or the standards established by the McMaster University Student and Faculty Codes of Conduct or other relevant University Policies.

2.3 In general terms, the CPSO defines “Professional Relationship” in the policy entitled “Professional Responsibilities in Undergraduate Medical Education” (approved by CPSO Council, September 18, 2003).

*It is expected that physicians involved in the education of medical students will:*

- *provide a model of appropriate and compassionate care;*
- *maintain an ethical approach to the care of patients;*
- *maintain a professional relationship with medical students at all times, which includes:*
  - *not exploiting the power differential that is inherent in the relationship;*
  - *not becoming involved in situations involving potential conflicts of interest;*
  - *not intimidating or harassing medical students emotionally, physically or sexually;*
  - *maintain a professional relationship with all other colleagues, which includes not intimidating or harassing them emotionally, physically or sexually*

## • 3. Reporting a Complaint about Unprofessional Behaviour

3.1 The CPSO Policy “Professional Responsibilities in Undergraduate Medical Education” states, “It is expected that physicians involved in the education of medical students will report to the educational institution when a medical student exhibits behaviours that would suggest incompetence or incapacity, fails to behave professionally and ethically in interactions with patients, supervisors, and/or colleagues, or otherwise engages in inappropriate behaviour. Similarly, educational institutions are expected to provide a supportive environment that allows medical students to make a report if they believe their supervisor and/or the most responsible physician exhibits behaviours that would suggest incompetence or incapacity, is engaging in or has engaged in sexual abuse of patients or

colleagues, or is engaging or has engaged in harassment of patients and colleagues”.

#### • 4. Complaint Resolution

The complaint resolution process which follows, provides internal, informal steps for resolving complaints and are supplemental to University policies and procedures. In all cases a complainant may opt to initiate the University Policy immediately.

- 4.1 Where a clinical preceptor believes that a student has demonstrated unprofessional behaviour in the clinical setting he/she should a) discreetly inform the student directly and verbally at the session(s) at which the behaviour was observed, or as soon as possible thereafter, and provide corrective feedback. If the unprofessional behaviour is egregious or is repeated, this should be documented in writing on the End of Unit Evaluation form, and may result in a Provisional Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory on the overall End of Unit Evaluation (see Faculty Policy and Procedure for the Evaluation of Undergraduate Medical Students, approved April 2003).
- 4.2 Where a student believes that a deficit in faculty professional behaviour has occurred, the complaint should be discreetly addressed directly and verbally at the session at which the behaviour(s) were observed. If the perceived breach of professional behaviour is egregious or is repeated, this should be documented in writing on the End of Unit Faculty Evaluation Form which may be signed by an individual student or a group of students.
- 4.3 Where a student is uncomfortable addressing a complaint directly to the clinical preceptors, he/she may address the complaint verbally or in writing to the Chair, Student Affairs Committee.
- 4.4 Any student or faculty member who has reason to believe that he or she has been subjected to harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability (or any personal characteristic included in the Human Rights Code), is entitled to invoke the University's Sexual Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policies (and therefore has the right to consult with the McMaster University Office of Human Rights and Equity Services or the Faculty of Health Sciences Liaison to the Human Rights Office) in addition to the procedures set out in sections 4.2 and 4.3 above.
- 4.5 When a complaint has been laid by a student in relation to Sections 4.2 and 4.3 above, the Chair, Student Affairs Committee will make an initial determination of whether the complaint does in fact relate to the issues of professional behaviour laid out in the MD Program General Guide and/or the CPSO Professional Relationship Policy or whether in fact the complaint should more reasonably fall under the provisions of the Sexual Harassment or Anti-Discrimination Policies of McMaster University. In this case the Policies and Procedures of the latter will prevail, provided a complaint is initiated thereunder and in accordance therewith.
- 4.6 If the complaint does relate to a breach of Professional Behaviour, the Chair, Student Affairs will investigate the complaint and pass the complaint to the relevant Department Chair of the Faculty Member, which Department Chair will take appropriate steps to satisfy him/herself that there is a problem, including talking with the faculty member on an informal basis, with a view to resolving the problem. When the Department Chair concludes that a serious breach of professional behaviour requires correction, the McMaster University Code of Conduct for Faculty and Procedures for Taking Disciplinary Action shall be applied.
- 4.7 If a student has the perception that verbal or written comments critical of the professional behaviour of the clinical preceptor have subsequently influenced the faculty evaluation of student performance adversely, the student has the following recourse:
  - the evaluation should EITHER be submitted to the Unit Chair who may ask for more information or arrange for a third (neutral) party to complete an evaluation of the

- student, OR
- file a Type II grievance under the Student Appeals Procedures (see McMaster University Student Appeals Procedure, Revision June 19, 1987)