



Witness statements provided by staff or students

Witness statements may be requested by a number of people to support incidents that should raise concerns these include;

- Poor or unsafe clinical practice.
- Professional misconduct.
- Health and safety risks, including risks to clients, patients, visitors and staff.
- Bullying of patients, clients, visitors, staff or students.
- Drug or alcohol abuse.
- Verbal, mental, physical or sexual abuse.
- Accident, injury or unexpected death
- Damage to the environment.
- Conduct that is an offence or breach of the law.

However it must be emphasised that in most day-to-day placement activity, under the capable supervision of mentors and others, learners flourish in the clinical practice environment. Mentors and learners manage their day-to-day practice and work through challenges, such as different ways of working, with discussion. Following this, many complaints may also be resolved informally by consultation between the student(s), personal tutor or other staff concerned. The University encourages the use this informal option when appropriate and where possible.

In addition there may be a situation where a student may not be performing at the standard required of them, due to a variety of reasons; in this case a Fitness to Practice procedure may be instigated. The policy and procedure for this can be found on POPPI and is part of all handbooks for undergraduate students. This may also require statements to be written by the student, mentor or other clinical staff and discussed, in the first instance, with the Programme Lead and Personal Tutor.

The most frequent reason for a student being asked to write a formal statement is when they have witnessed a serious or untoward incident in clinical practice as suggested in the list. In these situations a clear objective statement will be required, but the student **MUST** always seek help from their Personal Tutor before writing such a statement. It is also vital to emphasise that serious or untoward incidents (SUIs) cannot remain unreported until the end of a placement or a planned tutorial; they **MUST** be acted on quickly (See Policy on POPPI)

The witness statement must contain objective data, not speculation or hearsay. Students must not submit reflective accounts to a third party in respect of a reported 'incident'. Reflective accounts are often subjective and will be their very nature contain personal thought and opinion

Writing a witness statement, guidelines for staff & students

These guidelines are designed to help staff support students with the requirements of a witness statement.

It is of particular importance to identify a witness statement goes against everything students are taught about confidentiality. The statement must provide names and places but must be kept confidential by us, so should have restricted 'circulation'.

If a student is asked to write a witness statement (this should occur for any 'incident' that might have future repercussions), they need effective support to undertake this. This guidance, which purposefully doesn't provide a formal template, has been developed in response to requests from staff & as a result of our work with the police and our legal department. If as a Personal Tutor you feel unable to provide adequate or timely student support then please seek help from a colleague with the expertise.

The student may feel that reporting an 'incident' whether verbally or in writing was in itself stressful & they will need additional support when asked to re-visit the event. The witness statement may need to be written more than once to clarify details; but must be objective not subjective, with as much detail as possible.

Using bullet points can be helpful....

- 1) Name & type of student writing report i.e. Jo Blogs 2nd year adult nursing student not just 'I'
- 2) Date and time of event, if hours and minutes can't be stated then 'before lunch or middle of the night' are acceptable
- 3) Accurate details of where the event took place e.g. by bed 5 on Smith Ward in Jones DGH, not just on my placement
- 4) Accurate description of what happened and the names of those involved, including staff and patients. If the area has a policy of identifying staff by 1st name only, then state this & give the name & designation e.g. Betty the RN on duty rather than just the trained nurse.
- 5) Describe factually what you saw or heard happen, don't surmise as in 'I thought that Dr X would visit the patient after I rang him' state 'I requested that Dr X visit the patient, whilst I was on duty this did not occur'
- 6) If you were actually involved in the incident, you should state how you were being supervised / supported by the trained staff
- 7) Describe what support you were offered at the time e.g. 'following the needle-stick injury my mentor Staff Nurse Betty sent me to A&E and an incident report was completed.
- 8) The statement should be dated.

The student should keep a copy of this statement for themselves as they may need to refer to it in the future, which may be a long time. Staff should also keep any emails that detail the incident, prior to the witness statement being written, particularly if the police may be involved