

Bullying in healthcare: will earlier intervention create a more compassionate workforce?

Sara Beattie-Spanjol¹

Orla Hilton¹

Author details can be found at the end of this article

Correspondence to:

Sara Beattie-Spanjol;
sarabeattiespanjol@yahoo.co.uk

Sir,

We found reading the article by Simpson and Simpson (<https://doi.org/10.12968/hmed.2021.0343>) interesting, and it allowed us to understand some of the factors contributing to the over-representation of bullying in healthcare. To help resolve this ongoing issue, measures aimed at encouraging empathy during training may help make compassion for colleagues a prerequisite to working in healthcare.

As final year medical students, we feel the highly competitive nature of medical school facilitates an unempathetic atmosphere, increasing the likelihood of bullying at a horizontal level. At our medical school, an opportunity for students to engage in Schwartz rounds is offered in their first clinical year, enabling early examination of how difficult situations make both clinicians and their colleagues feel (Gleeson et al, 2020). Early introduction of group reflective practices such as Schwartz rounds and Balint groups may proactively mitigate against the creation of an unsympathetic workplace, rather than relying on reactive organisational strategies once that environment already exists.

Despite negative effects on mental health and learning, the hierarchical nature of medicine together with a culture of self-sacrifice and deference are often perceived as a rite of passage for students (Colenbrander et al, 2020). Transitioning from didactic lectures to senior-led, problem-based learning within healthcare training may foster a more cooperative atmosphere and help break the cyclical nature of mistreatment of juniors to prevent bullying at a vertical level.

Earlier intervention to deal with bullying and a shift from a competitive to a collaborative approach to training may elicit both more empathy and more compassion for colleagues in healthcare.

Author details

¹Department of Medicine, Imperial College London, London, UK

References

- Colenbrander L, Causer L, Haire B. 'If you can't make it, you're not tough enough to do medicine': a qualitative study of Sydney-based medical students' experiences of bullying and harassment in clinical settings. *BMC Med Educ.* 2020;20(1):1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02001-y>
- Gleeson D, Arwyn-Jones J, Awan M, White I, Halse O. Medical student Schwartz Rounds: a powerful medium for medical student reflective practice. *AMEP.* 2020;11:775–780. <https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S273181>

How to cite this article:

Beattie-Spanjol S, Hilton O. Bullying in healthcare: will earlier intervention create a more compassionate workforce? *Br J Hosp Med.* 2021. <https://doi.org/10.12968/hmed.2021.0468>