



American Medical Women's Association

The Vision and Voice of Women in Medicine since 1915

American Medical Women's Association Position Paper on Abuse in Medical Education

The American Medical Women's Association is an organization of women physicians and medical students that maintains among its primary missions the promotion of education and training of women physicians. The relationship between the teacher and the student should be based on mutual trust and respect. (1) It is the position of the American Medical Women's Association that certain behaviors by teachers, house staff, and other students are abusive, disruptive of the learning process, and should not be tolerated. Some examples of these behaviors include the following:

- Verbal comments of a derogatory or a demeaning nature that do not contribute to a constructive learning environment
- Physical violence of any nature
- Physical threats or punishments
- Sexual harassment
- Degrading comments or discrimination based on gender, nationality, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical characteristics
- Grading or threats of grading used to punish a student rather than to objectively evaluate academic or clinical performance
- Attempts at deception concerning credit for the work of others or mistreatment in the care of patients
- Request for the performance of personal services
- Requiring the performance of hazardous medical procedures without sound medical indication or without proper protective equipment

Student abuse may also take the form of institutional policies, regulations, procedures, and/or standards that violate students' individual rights or place them at medical or psychological risk. These policies, regulations, or procedures that discriminate based on gender, race, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical disability. In as much possible, evaluations should be based on objective indications of academic and clinical performance.

Student abuse results in inferior learning; less effective patient care; cynicism; diminished humanitarianism; and persistent psychological problems including feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, depression, and frustration.(2) Such outcomes interfere with the practice of medicine and the physical and psychological well-being of physicians, their colleagues, and their families. (3, 4)

The American Medical Women's Association, therefore, opposes all forms of medical student and housestaff abuse and advocates educational and institutional policies to identify and effectively eliminate abusive behavior in the learning environment. AMWA supports programs that provide the following:

- Education of faculty, residents, and students regarding rights and responsibilities
- A safe, non-threatening mechanism for reporting and evaluating allegations of mistreatment
- The guarantee of rights of privacy and due process
- Appointment of grievance procedures and committees to investigate ongoing disputes
- Establishment of procedures to educate involved parties and punish persistent offenders
- Availability of counseling for all parties involved

- Procedures to evaluate and promote faculty with consideration of their effectiveness in teaching and evaluation
- Involvement of student and resident representatives establishing clear performance goals and evaluation

REFERENCES

1. American Medical Association: Statement of Teacher-Learner Relationship in Medical Education; Code of Behavior. From the AMA Section on Medical Schools in Cooperation with AMWA Student and Resident Sections. Excerpted from Report ZZ of the Board of Trustees, Adopted by the House of Delegates at Interim Meeting 1990.
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3. Silver HK, Glick AD: Medical Student Abuse -- Incidence, Severity, and Significance. JAMA 263(4):527, 1990.
4. Rosenberg DA, Silver HK: Medical Student Abuse -- An Unnecessary and Preventable Cause of Stress. JAMA 251(6):739, 1984.

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