

Post-session handout for Confidential Contacts

Case study – HR signposting

Part one

You receive an email from the whistleblower. The email advises that the member of staff works in a ward and has concerns about their Senior Charge Nurse. The email requests that you contact them.

Part two

You acknowledge the email and arrange a suitable time to call/meet with the whistleblower. You also record their contact details on the contact form.

You meet/call the whistleblower and explain your role as Confidential Contact and ask them to explain the situation to you. You discuss the concerns in more detail and they tell you:

- They feel that they are being subjected to harassment by their Senior Charge Nurse.
- They explain that this stems from an incident in which a student nurse had raised concerns about the expiry date of medication stored in the fridge. The Senior Charge Nurse had dismissed the student's concerns and stated that there was no time for an audit of the fridge medication.
- The whistleblower witnessed this conversation and was seen comforting the student nurse when they became upset following the discussion with the Senior Charge Nurse.
- The student nurse has since left. However, the Senior Charge Nurse has made several comments about the student nurse, saying that they were oversensitive and making mountains out of molehills. The whistleblower defended the student nurse saying that they felt they had done the right thing to raise their concerns.
- It was after this conversation that the behaviour of the Senior Charge Nurse changed, they now often speak over the whistleblower or contradict them during meetings. They also frequently question their record keeping when it has never been an issue before.
- The Senior Charge Nurse has also started following the whistleblower around the ward. This behaviour is different from the way that other nurses are managed.



- The pressure of the scrutiny is causing the whistleblower a great deal of stress and they are struggling to sleep and eat normally, which is impacting on their work and putting a strain on their family life.
- The whistleblower is worried that this will happen to someone else and wants it to stop before they are signed off on sick leave.

You seek clarification from the person on what it is they want to take forward. You ask if the issues with outdated medication are continuing or if it is the behaviours of the manager that the person wants to raise?

The person says that they did not see the outdated medication themselves and have not seen anything to suggest that it is an ongoing problem. They are more concerned about the way they are being treated for standing up for a colleague.

Part three

You explain the definition of whistleblowing and that if there was an ongoing issue with outdated medication, this would be appropriate for the whistleblowing procedure. However, you acknowledge that this is not the focus of the whistleblower's concerns and, based on what you have been told, it does not sound like an ongoing patient safety issue. You explain that in this case, the behaviour of the manager seems to relate to an individual employment situation, which means it should be dealt with through an HR process, rather than as a whistleblowing issue. You explain the difference between HR issues and whistleblowing as they are outlined in the Standards. You agree to provide information on the Bullying and Harassment Policy, so that they can take it forward.

You explain to the whistleblower that you are concerned about the impact that this has had on them, and you provide them with appropriate signposting to services which may be able to assist and support the person with the HR process, including signposting to the trade union. You explain the role of the Confidential Contact and offer to send on information about the Standards as well, just in case they notice further issues with the medication and decide to progress these concerns under the Standards.

Takeaway points

- If you are unsure if a concern can be investigated under the Whistleblowing Standards, you can always contact your Whistleblowing Lead or the INWO advice line on 0800 008 6112. It is important to remember that it is not the role of the Confidential Contact to make a decision on behalf of the Board about whether or not something can be considered under the whistleblowing



procedure. However, you can discuss the difference between HR and whistleblowing concerns and provide signposting that you think is appropriate. If the person wishes to access the Standards, they can ask to do so and it will be for the Board to take a final decision on whether or not it can be taken forward under the whistleblowing procedure or should be referred to HR procedures.

- Not everything that comes to a Confidential Contact will end up being a whistleblowing concern. Sometimes the issues may relate to an individual employment situation and signposting to HR procedures is the most appropriate action. You can refer to the Standards for some helpful information on the difference between grievances and whistleblowing: [The difference between a grievance and a concern | INWO \(spsso.org.uk\)](#)
- Confidential Contacts may hear about patient safety concerns that do not end up progressing through the Standards. If you are uncomfortable that you have heard about something that presents a risk to staff or patient safety, you can consider sharing limited information with the Board as an anonymous concern. If the whistleblower does not want to access the Standards, you can inform them that you will refer the information to the Board as an anonymous concern. This way the Board have the opportunity to consider it but the whistleblower will not have any involvement.
- Confidential Contacts should familiarise themselves with the support options and alternative processes already available in the Board so that they are prepared to signpost. This could include counselling services, occupational health services, chaplaincy, trade unions, Bullying and Harassment procedures etc. If you are unsure – ask the Whistleblowing Lead or the HR department.
- You can always refer to the National Whistleblowing Standards for information on what the whistleblower should expect to happen during [the whistleblowing process](#). You can also find the information you need to discuss things like [support and protection under the Standards](#), and [confidentiality](#).

Further information

- The [National Whistleblowing Standards](#)
- [Independent National Whistleblowing Officer FAQs for whistleblowers](#)
- [Independent National Whistleblowing Officer contact details](#)