

## **Special Issues Presented to Residents: How to Prevent Student Complaints of Harassment/Mistreatment**

- **Medical Students:** It is best not talk about personal issues, yours or theirs:
  - Don't ask or comment about their spouse or significant other.
  - Don't tell them your spouse or significant other "doesn't understand" you.
  - Don't ask for a date (at least while they are under your supervision).
  - Don't call them at home (except for a medical emergency related to the service).
  - Do not go to a student's house. If invited, go with a colleague so no one will get the wrong idea.
  - It is nice to take students out to lunch or dinner, but always take at least two out at a time.
  - Do not single one student out, no matter how well you get along with him/her.
  - The best time to develop a friendship is AFTER you are no longer their supervisor.
  - Do not demonstrate the physical exam on a student, or have a student demonstrate parts of a physical exam on you. Despite good educational intentions, they may be afraid to tell you it is unwelcome, and it is likely to be misconstrued.
  
- **Patients:** It is unethical to date a patient, no matter how brief your professional encounter:
  - Depending upon individual state laws, you may risk losing your license.
  - If you think the patient is attracted to you, take someone into the room with you, even if they are fully clothed.
  - Do not offer to walk a patient to his/her car.
  - Do not do anything you do not do for every patient.
  - It is best not to become involved with family members, as you encounter them at a time when they are vulnerable, and it may be considered exploitative.
  
- **Staff:** More complex – Though not strictly unethical, it is better not to become involved with someone you work with directly. This includes members of other health care professions, as well as clinical and medical school office staff.
  - Be aware that staff may feel pressured or harassed by you in just the same way that a student could
  - Inequities in your age vs that of the staff member create a potential for a power differential
  - Your advances to a staff member may be unwelcome and they may fear professional consequences
  - Your harassment of staff members can be justifiably reported to Grievance Officer or ETSU Compliance, just as harassment of medical students can be, and can result in professional consequences for you

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### *Medical Student Mistreatment Policy Basics*

To foster the development of the professional and collegial attitudes needed to provide caring and compassionate health care, it is essential to nurture these attitudes and promote an effective learning environment, free from mistreatment.

Mistreatment is defined as improper use or handling of an individual which may cause the subject to become more cynical about the medical profession, may interfere with the learning process, may cause talented individuals to leave medical training, and may promote an atmosphere in which abuse is accepted and perpetuated in medical training.

Examples of inappropriate and unacceptable behavior include:

- Harmful, injurious, or offensive conduct
- Verbal attacks
- Insults or unjustifiably harsh language in speaking to or about a person
- Public belittling or humiliation
- Threats of physical harm
- Physical attacks (e.g., hitting, slapping, or kicking a person)
- Requiring performance of personal services (e.g., shopping, baby sitting)
- Threatening with a lower grade or poor evaluation for reason other than course/clinical performance
- Sexual Harassment
- Discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnic background, age, or physical disability
- Intentional neglect or lack of communication
- Taking credit for another individual's work
- Disregard for student safety
- Any other behavior which is contrary to the spirit of learning and/or violates the trust between the teacher and learner.

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**Medical Student Mistreatment Policy:** QCOM Catalog Policies & Procedures, click on “Mistreatment Prevention” and “Sexual Harassment” <https://catalog.etsu.edu/content.php?catoid=28&navoid=1366>

**Mistreatment Policy “Grievance Officer” & Contact:** Patricia Amadio, MD, [amadio@etsu.edu](mailto:amadio@etsu.edu) ; or by text: 901-497-7156  
**IF YOU EXPERIENCE MISTREATMENT OR HARASSMENT:** [Link to Anonymous Grievance Reporting System](#)