

Raising concerns in, and about, practice

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Ask, Raise, Escalate & Engage.

Context

Raising concerns is defined as identifying an issue and bringing it to the attention of a colleague or manager (RCN, 2023).

Raising concerns in practice is a sign of integrity, not insubordination. It is recognised that students have an important role in raising concerns about the standard of care (Francis Report, 2013), but they face real and perceived challenges when raising concerns which impact on their decision to do so (Fisher & Kiernan, 2019; Phillips et al, 2025).

Nurses, and students, should raise concerns immediately whenever they come across situations that put patients or public safety at risk (NMC, 2018) and all learners should know how to do this, and feel empowered to speak up (NHSE, 2024).

All NHS organisations and others providing NHS healthcare services in primary and secondary care in England are required to adopt the national Freedom to Speak Up policy (NHS England, 2022) which states that preventing or deterring people from speaking up will not be tolerated.

Any concerns raised by healthcare students in Greater Manchester will instigate the GM Incident in Practice process and an investigation by both the university and practice partners.

The PARE evaluation is important for monitoring the overall quality of student placements, but is not the right method to raise concerns or report incidents. Raising these after placements reduces the likelihood of issues being successfully investigated.

Actions

The Academic Lead for Practice Governance (ALPG) & Academic Lead for Practice Development (ALPD) lead on these issues and related activities for the nursing programmes.

They will ensure nursing students are encouraged, supported and educated to raise concerns. To do so, they will;

- Provide information and resources via the Practice Learning Sharepoint
- Include this topic in all ALPD & ALPG sessions with students
- Work with practice and university partners to ensure raising concerns is encouraged and supported across Greater Manchester
- Work with the programme teams to ensure raising concerns is included in simulation and theory units where applicable

Process

Students should raise concerns in practice without delay if there is a risk to those in their care or the public. Practice staff should encourage students to be inquisitive and positively respond to any concerns. Academic staff will support students and practice partners to raise and resolve concerns transparently and collaboratively. Students should be made aware of local policies for raising concerns and their professional role during their placement orientation.

Students

Ask yourself;

- Is there a risk to a person's safety or dignity?
- Is someone working outside their scope of practice?
- Is there a breach of policy, the Code or the law?

Ask;

- Students should initially ask the person involved about the issue, focusing on curiosity not confrontation
- Consider the best place & time to do this, and whether it is safe

Raise;

- If this is not possible, or does not resolve the issue, students should speak with their supervisor, shift manager or assessor

Escalate;

- Again, if this is not possible or does not resolve the concern, students should escalate the issue to the Practice Education Facilitator (PEF) or someone more senior, e.g. Matron, Director, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.
- Students may choose to use the placement provider's formal method to raise concerns, whistle blow or report incidents

Engage;

- Once a concern has been raised, students are an essential part of the investigation which is unlikely to proceed without their input
- Academic Advisors, Lecturers and other University staff are available to help
- Students can and should discuss issues with their Academic Advisor at any point to seek guidance and support
- Academic Advisors will support students to write a formal statement if needed
- Additional support is available from the wellbeing team and counselling service

Practice staff

- Should complete the student's orientation at the beginning of the placement ensuring students are encouraged and facilitated to raise concerns
- Should be open to questions and learning opportunities

PEFs and Academics

- PEFs will work with students and practice staff to ensure concerns are acknowledged and addressed, liaising with the Academic team
- They will ensure students are safe, supported and not treated detrimentally when they report a concern
- PEFs will complete the initial Incident in Practice form and submit this to the University
- Academic Advisors & Leads will support and supervise student engagement to ensure this is reasonable, proportionate and not distressing
- The Academic Leads for Practice Governance & Development will work with Practice Learning Leads, PEFs, practice staff, etc. as necessary to address concerns
- The Academic Lead for Practice Governance will decide on further actions & referrals based on the outcome of the investigation
- The Academic Lead for Practice Development will consider any adjustments for the student's future placement journey

Appendix 1: How to raise concerns in practice

Steps

Recognise the concern

- Is there a risk to safety, dignity or standards?

Ask

- If safe to do so, speak to the person involved
- If not resolved, or too serious...

Raise

- Speak to your supervisor
- If not resolved, or too serious...

Escalate

- Speak to the service manager, PEF or other senior nurse

Engage

- Work with practice and your AA to address the concerns

At any point, contact your Academic Advisor

Asking

If you think there might be an issue or if you are concerned about something you have seen, first consider if it is safe to speak to the person involved.

If it is safe to ask, focus on curiosity, not confrontation. Use open-ended, neutral questions. By asking the right kind of questions, the person should reflect on their actions and explain their thoughts. Socratic questioning is a technique that helps people reflect on their understanding of a specific topic (Hu, 2023). It involves respectfully asking open-ended questions to clarify understanding and promote critical thinking. Types include:

Type	Purpose	Examples
Clarification	Explore meaning	<i>Can you explain what you mean by...?</i>
Assumption	Probe assumptions	<i>Could there be another explanation?</i>
Reason & evidence	Encourage justification	<i>What is the evidence for this approach?</i>
Viewpoint	Different perspectives	<i>Is there another way to do/see this?</i>
Implications & consequence	Explores impact	<i>What could happen if we do it this way?</i>
Questioning	Encourages reflection	<i>Why do you think I am asking?</i>

Keep your tone and questions respectful. Consider the right time and place, which may not be in front of the person receiving the care. Ask the person if you can discuss the care with them, remaining professional and focusing on factual, not emotional, questions.

Raising & escalating

If an issue is not resolved by asking questions, or it is not safe / appropriate to do so, you may need to raise it with another member of staff or report it via a formal route.

Remember to focus on the situation you directly observed.

Be specific about the issue and why it concerns you.

Be factual, not emotive, and remain professional – respectful, non-confrontational and constructive.

Provide evidence or supporting information if it is available.

Appendix 2: additional guidance

Council of Deans <https://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CoDH-lit-review-students-raising-concerns-FINAL-with-covers.pdf>

Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust <https://mft.nhs.uk/medical-education/student-practice-placement/wtwa/wythenshawe-hospital/students-raising-concerns-in-practice/>

The National Guardian's Office <https://nationalguardian.org.uk/>

NMC guidance <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/blocks/media-block/raising-concerns-v2.pdf>

PARE guidance (<https://onlinepare.net/dashboard.php>):

Raising a concern whilst on placement

Guidance for placement educators

Learners have an important role in raising concerns about the standard of care (Francis Report, 2013) and you have a duty to protect patients/service users and carers, putting their interests first if concerns are raised. As your learner's first line of support in practice, you must give them the confidence and opportunity to speak up.

Learners need to feel that they are trusted and their questions and concerns are respected:

- How, when, and why to raise concerns must be part of the induction conversation you have with your learner whether they are with you for a day or several years.
- At times, the learner may not feel comfortable speaking to you about concerns or accept your response. Identify, in advance, how they can escalate concerns appropriately; in line with local guidance or policy.
- Manage their expectations by being open and honest that things do not always happen as you might intend.
- Be clear that you want your learner to ask you about what they observe and tell you what worries them. Discussing situations early may help keep issues in perspective and improve the experience for all.

Ensure that you are familiar with:

- The leads for education in practice (e.g., Practice Education Facilitators, Work Based Education Facilitator, Undergraduate/Postgraduate Education Manager, or Cadet Lead) and how to contact them.*
- The Education Provider's learner support staff (e.g., personal tutors).
- How you and learners use your local incident reporting system* or contact the Patient Safety team.*

RCN guidance <https://www.rcn.org.uk/employment-and-pay/raising-concerns>

References

Fisher, M. and Kiernan, M. (2019). Student nurses' lived experience of patient safety and raising concerns. *Nurse education today*, 77, pp.1–5.

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Royal College of Nursing (2023) *Raising and Escalating Concerns* [Available online](#) Accessed on 07/04/2025