



MD Program
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

2019 Professionalism Report: High-level Summary



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Too often, learners are not treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve as colleagues and members of our health care community. Mistreatment in our clinical and learning environments is enabled by several factors:

- The hidden curriculum, which comprises the values, norms, and beliefs that make up medical culture
- Hierarchies and other power asymmetries
- A culture of silence
- A lack of clarity around definitions, processes for managing mistreatment, and consequences for individuals responsible for unprofessional behaviours, and a lack of supports for learners experiencing mistreatment

The 2019 iteration of our Voice of the MD Student survey revealed concerning findings about our learning environment. Over the prior academic year:

- 1. 25% of students had experienced harassment**
- 2. 40% of student experienced discrimination**
- 3. The primary sources of mistreatment included faculty (45%), patients and their families (35%), and other medical students (22%)**
- 4. The majority of these negative experiences occurred in clinical environments (71%), although some did occur on campus (17%).**

These results are similar to the findings of national surveys, in which 42% of medical graduates had felt publicly humiliated at one point over the course of their training. The literature also tells us that our situation is not unique; mistreatment is reported across clinical programs and across jurisdictions.

Unfortunately, despite these reported rates, only a small number of learners come forward to report concerning behaviour in our environments. This may be due to a lack of clarity around what constitutes mistreatment, inadequate reporting mechanisms (or communication about existing mechanisms), and fear of retaliation. In 2019, we received 17 disclosures / reports: 9 related to unprofessional behaviour, 4 to discrimination, 3 to sexual violence or harassment, and 1 classified as other. The sources of mistreatment were predominantly Faculty members (9) and other MD Program learners (7). These were managed in the following ways:

- 7 were escalated to senior leadership to manage and resolve; outcomes ranged from notations in their performance records, written reflections, referral for coaching or remediation, or academic sanctions, including removal from leadership, educational, or research roles
- 4 matters were investigated and determined to be unsubstantiated
- 1 learner elected not to escalate their disclosure
- 5 matters were resolved but no resolution data was collected; we are developing processes for more effectively tracking resolutions in order to provide greater accountability in future annual reports.

As part of our Academic Strategic Plan 2018–2023 and consistent with our [MD Program response](#) to the recommendations from the student-led [Independent Student Analysis \(ISA\)](#), we are committed to working in partnership with our learners to shift culture and improve our working and learning climate for us all. Here are some of the steps we are taking:

1. Awareness-building, including enhanced communications about the importance of professional values; equity, diversity, and inclusion; and wellness as a means to promote a positive workplace culture:

- a. [Mentors and Allies](#)
- b. [Valuing Wellness Across the Faculty](#)
- c. [Adaptive, Inclusive, Professional Care](#)
- d. [Why We All Belong](#)
- e. [Achievement, Wellness and Professionalism](#)
- f. [MD Program Response to the Independent Student Analysis \(ISA\)](#)
- g. [Respecting MD Students: It's Not a Choice](#)

2. Education events for Faculty members and learners on topics related, directly or indirectly, to learner mistreatment:

- a. [How Do We Talk About Race? – January 21, 2020](#)
- b. [Accessibility, Action and Inclusion Panel Event – December 3, 2019](#)
- c. [Dialogues in Diversity: Explorations of the EDI \(Equity, Diversity & Inclusion\) Implications of COVID-19:](#) webinar series
- d. Faculty Development including a new online module reviewing [Standards of Professional Behaviour for Medical Clinical Faculty](#)
- e. Planned educational initiatives on Anti-Black Racism, Indigenous Cultural Safety, Religious Discrimination, and Anti-Semitism
- f. MD mistreatment module for learners in 2T3 planned for November 2020

3. Accountability

We have appointed Prof. Reena Pattani as the Faculty of Medicine's inaugural Director, Learner Experience, starting May 1, 2020. In this new role, Prof. Pattani will champion the development, implementation, and evaluation of approaches to help mitigate the impact of negative events on learners and to reinforce positive cultural norms and professional values. She will be working in partnership with Prof. Pier Bryden, Director of Professional Values, to educate key faculty members on supporting learners who disclose concerns regarding professional relationships with other trainees, faculty, and staff, and informing them of the options and processes available to them in addressing these concerns.

In collaboration with MD Program learners, we have revised the MD Program student [mistreatment protocol](#), and launched new [web pages](#) and an [online disclosure form](#) in August 2020 to provide a learner-centered mistreatment portal that is easier to navigate. We hope you will check out these resources!

In order to ensure accountability to our learners, we will build on this report and commit to distributing an annual professionalism report that will present data regarding the frequency and spectrum of mistreatment behaviours occurring within our environment. This annual report will also present the spectrum of resolutions to illustrate some of the ways that the Faculty of Medicine responds to student concerns.

We know the impact that the learner environment has on the personal and professional development of our learners. We are committed to working in partnership with all of you to shift culture and improve the working and learning climate for us all. Over the year ahead, we will also strive to find more ways to celebrate the positive things that members in our academic community do to support each other every day. Please [contact us at any time](#) if you have feedback or advice on how we can do better. There is much work ahead, and we recognize that the culture shift that we require will demand sustained effort from us all.