Medical Student Advocacy Committee: Procedures

The Medical Student Advocacy Committee (MSAC) hears, evaluates, and responds to reports of mistreatment or unacceptable behaviors directed at or witnessed by medical students. In addition, the Committee is proactive in educating its members as well as others in the UVA School of Medicine medical education community (medical students, housestaff, faculty, and other staff) in an effort to prevent mistreatment or unacceptable behaviors directed at or witnessed by medical students. This has been achieved through required medical student sessions (for example, during Orientation and the Transitions Course), visits to clinical departmental meetings to discuss the professional treatment of medical students, invitations to guest speakers to present at MSAC meetings, and members’ discussion of journal articles relating to medical student mistreatment and medical student moral distress.

Processes Available to Students for Making Reports

Medical students can make reports about mistreatment or unacceptable behaviors in person or by phone or email to any member of the Committee. Medical students can also make reports to the Committee using the “Student Listening Post” web site http://www.med-ed.virginia.edu/listen/. Students can choose whether or not to include their name on reports made through the “Student Listening Post.” In addition, medical students can report unacceptable behavior through the clerkship evaluations that they complete on OASIS – OASIS reports received by MSAC do not contain the name of the student completing the evaluation. While anonymous reports limit the type of investigation and response available since the source of the information is unavailable, this type of reporting provides a view of the learning environment and allows monitoring for early trends of potential problems. Reports that come to the MSAC are handled in the manner described below.

The University also has a web site for all students for reporting bias complaints: http://www.virginia.edu/justreportit  Further, Medical Center Policy 0262 http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/docs/manuals/policies/mc provides another means by which to note complaints of unacceptable behavior involving
members of the Clinical Staff, GME Trainees, or Allied Health Professionals. Reports made through University or Medical Center processes are handled by the University or Medical Center respectively. They are not reviewed by MSAC unless the report also comes to MSAC separately, or is referred to MSAC by the University or Medical Center per their policies and procedures.

**Confidentiality and Required Reporting by MSAC:**
Reports of mistreatment or unacceptable behavior are handled confidentially to the extent possible given the Committee’s obligation to review the report and send it to the appropriate body for investigation, as described in more detail below. There are, however, exceptions, such as if the alleged offense falls under the University Policy on Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence and the University deems itself required by law to investigate and take reasonable action, or other offenses that would require reporting based on legal or ethical responsibilities, including those identified in Medical Center Policy 0262. Students making in-person reports to a Committee member may choose whether to appear before the Committee to discuss their reports or to have their reports presented by a member of the Committee. These reports can be presented with the student identified or anonymous. When a student making the report identifies him/herself, in most instances, the Committee will take no action without the consent of the student who makes the report, unless the Committee is required by law to take action.

**Process:**
Reports of mistreatment or unacceptable behavior submitted via OASIS or the Listening Post will be sent automatically to the Chair of the Medical Student Advocacy Committee and the Assistant Dean for Medical Education. By design, reports from OASIS and the Listening Post do not contain the name of the student making the report unless the student identifies him/herself in the report. In-person reports can be made to any member of the Committee or to the Committee as a whole. A student reporting mistreatment or unacceptable behavior to a Committee member may request that he or she not be identified to the whole Committee. Except when reporting to other groups by the Committee is required by law or University or Medical Center policies, a medical student’s agreement on the desired handling of the report will be sought in most instances. When reporting to other groups is required (e.g. when sexual misconduct incidents must be reported to another group such as University Dean’s office or
EOP or the Medical Center), students will be informed of these automatic follow-up reporting requirements.

OASIS and Listening Post reports will first be reviewed by the Chair of the Medical Student Advocacy Committee and the Assistant Dean for Medical Education to determine whether the report falls within the purview of the Committee. (If not, the Chair and Assistant Dean will assure that the report has been sent to the appropriate unit. For example, OASIS reports dealing with curricular issues are accessible to the appropriate System Leader or Clerkship Director, and may be sent on to the Curriculum Committee.) Reports will also be reviewed to determine whether they fall under the purview of University or Medical Center policies. If so, the policy and procedures specified for those types of reports will be followed. If the student has identified him/herself, he or she will also be referred to additional resources for any additional support needed.

The decision to take action in response to a report is the responsibility of the Chair and the Assistant Dean for Medical Education who may, in consultation with the Office of Medical Education, use discretion in deciding the timing of discussion of a report at a Committee meeting and in deciding how to respond to a report. Under some circumstances, the Chair and Assistant Dean, together with the Senior Associate Dean for Education or appropriate designee, may decide to take action before the report is brought to the whole Committee. All actions taken by the Chair and/or the full Committee will be documented by the Assistant Dean for Medical Education.

Reports shall be brought to the full Committee in a timely manner for discussion and for review of actions already taken, if any. In general, reports are brought to the Committee after the time period for grade submission has ended. Meetings are held monthly, and while there is no specific quorum requirement, meetings are not held without representation by student members. The reports are presented to the Committee in a redacted version which does not disclose the names of attendings, residents or staff about whom the reports have been written. After discussion of the behaviors described in the redacted reports, the Committee will propose whether or not to take action or, in some cases, further action. Typically the Committee requests that the Chair and Assistant Dean forward reports to the appropriate persons for investigation and remedy. This may include sending the reported allegation on for further investigation to
course/system directors, clerkship directors and department chairs, residency program directors, the senior associate dean for education, the senior associate dean for faculty affairs and faculty development, the Health System Peer Support and Triage Committee, the Professional Nursing Staff Organization, and/or the GME/housestaff office. These reports will be forwarded without redaction. The Chair and Assistant Dean follow up with units regarding the findings of the unit’s investigation, how the allegation was handled by the unit, and results. Data regarding departments or units receiving multiple or trending allegations of misconduct will be sent to the School of Medicine Dean for intervention.

The School of Medicine, University, and Medical Center have non-retaliation policies. Any reports of actual or perceived retaliation will be handled according to the institution’s non-retaliation policies.

Other actions the committee may take include:
   a) serving as a sounding board for students uncertain of the seriousness of a complaint; and/or
   b) providing advice to the student on how to deal with such a situation should it arise again; and/or
   c) offering discussion with faculty, GME trainees, or staff who may have engaged in mistreatment or inappropriate behavior. Supervisors of such individuals may be included in the discussions (e.g. Director of clerkship, elective or Department Chair) with request for follow-up; or
   d) maintaining a record, without further action, in order to identify individuals who have been named repeatedly in reports.

The Assistant Dean for Medical Education will maintain all reports, including but not limited to those received via OASIS and the Listening Post, as well as all documentation pertaining to actions taken and outcomes. The Assistant Dean for Medical Education will keep the Senior Associate Dean for Education regularly apprised of pertinent incidents.

All Committee members must sign a confidentiality agreement on a yearly basis.

Clerkship and elective directors have access to OASIS reports after grades have been officially recorded.
Composition of Committee:
The committee is chaired by a physician with recent or current clinical experience. Also serving on the committee is a clinician Vice Chair and three additional clinical faculty members. The Assistant Dean for Medical Education, the curriculum Director of Evaluation and the Director of the GME Office are *ex officio* members. Four medical students from each class serve on the committee – two are elected by their class in the first year and two are elected prior to the start of clerkships.

The Chair and Vice Chair are appointed by the Dean of the SOM. The Senior Associate Dean for Education solicits nominations from the Mulholland student government, department chairs and the faculty at large for the three additional clinical faculty positions, and recommends potential members to the UVA SOM Dean for appointment. All faculty members who are not ex-officio, including the Chair and Vice Chair, are appointed by the Dean of the SOM for three-year terms, with the possibility of one consecutive renewal. Members may be invited to return after a two-year hiatus for an additional term.

An MSAC faculty member who has unexcused absences from three consecutive regular Committee meetings may be removed. Prior to this action, the MSAC Chair will provide the member in question with written notice of possible removal. Members who cannot attend the majority of the meetings due to illness or sabbatical, etc. may request that the MSAC Chair, in consultation with the Senior Associate Dean and subject to the approval of the Dean, appoint a substitute for them during the duration of their absence.

Meetings are held monthly. While a specific quorum is not necessary, meetings are held only if students are in attendance.