



THE CONFEDERATION OF BRITISH SURGERY

SURGICAL ADVISORY SERVICE

CASE STUDY

ANONYMOUS CASE STUDY:
SUPPORTING A SURGEON FACING
WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

BACKGROUND

A trainee consultant surgeon began experiencing ongoing harassment from a colleague. The colleague frequently asked them out on dates and made inappropriate comments about their appearance and gender. These unwelcome advances created a hostile and uncomfortable working environment for the surgeon.

Unsure of how to handle the situation and reluctant to escalate it within their department, the surgeon contacted the Confederation of British Surgery (CBS) Surgical Advisory Service Helpline for advice and support.

INITIAL CONTACT AND SUPPORT

When the surgeon reached out to the CBS helpline, they were immediately offered a safe space to share their experiences. The CBS advisor listened with empathy and understanding, providing reassurance that their concerns were being taken seriously.

The surgeon explained the nature of the harassment, including repeated inappropriate comments and persistent attempts by the colleague to initiate unwanted personal interactions. They also expressed fear of possible repercussions or damage to their reputation if they took formal action.

The Surgical Advisory Service informed the surgeon of the various options available to them, both formal and informal, to address the issue. These options ranged from engaging in informal discussions with the colleague to formally reporting the behaviour to their Trust's Human Resources (HR) department or the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

They were also signposted to the CBS free counselling service.

GUIDANCE AND DECISION TO TAKE ACTION

Following the discussion, CBS helped the surgeon weigh the potential outcomes of each option.

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The surgeon ultimately decided not to pursue a formal complaint through HR.

CBS provided guidance on how to document incidents of harassment, including gathering dates, times, and specific examples of inappropriate behaviour. This documentation would support any future formal complaints the surgeon might wish to make.

OUTCOME

The outcome was a positive one for the surgeon, who clearly understood the options available to them. Additionally, they had clearly guidance of the steps they needed to take should the inappropriate behaviour continue and the support available to them.

CONCLUSION

By offering a listening ear, clear guidance, and practical assistance, CBS helped the surgeon navigate a difficult situation and understand that they are options available to them should they wish.

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