Supervisor’s Guide to Registrars in Difficulty

Overview

Research suggests that up to 10% of junior doctors run into difficulty. Most problems, when identified early and appropriately managed, can be resolved by the Supervisor working with the Registrar.

As Supervisors we have to decide:

- whether there really is a problem or not;
- if there is a problem, whether our role is to support and help the Registrar through a difficult time or whether this will perpetuate on ongoing problem;
- Whether to seek external advice or intervention.

Causes

Poor performance is a description, not a diagnosis. Trying to clearly identify the problem can be challenging at times.

There are many factors that can contribute to a Registrar experiencing difficulty during their training. The learning environment as well as internal or personal factors needs to be considered. Considering these prior to and during your discussions with your Registrar can be helpful in identifying the cause of the Registrar’s difficulties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learning environment at work:</td>
<td>Physical or mental ill health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Nature of the work (too challenging/not challenging enough)</td>
<td>Relationship stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Extent to which the Registrar feels safe, supported, and included</td>
<td>Poor organisational or interpersonal skills</td>
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<td>➢ Quality and quantity of supervision</td>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
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<td>➢ Exam pressure</td>
<td>Critical incident stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>The learning environment at home:</td>
<td>Lack of insight</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Family commitments</td>
<td>Inability to receive and understand feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Financial stress</td>
<td>Lack of professional ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Visa stress</td>
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A quick lighthearted summary of the personal reasons that Registrars may have as a cause of their difficulties is the “Bs”:

- Blues: ill health
- Booze: abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Babies: exhausted from parenting
- Birds/Blokes: relationship stress
- Banks: financial difficulties
- Bilingual: language or cultural issues.

**Which Registrars are particularly at risk of having difficulties?**

Whilst there are no hard and fast rules, some Registrars may be at higher risk than others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registrars at risk of having difficulties</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Returned from period of extended leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ In new town or region/without usual</td>
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<tr>
<td>social supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Has failed College assessment/s</td>
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<td>➢ Junior stage of training</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Stressful placement (high workload,</td>
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<tr>
<td>busy on calls, unavailable supervisor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Lack of insight (overly self-critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or over confident)</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Past history mental illness</td>
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**Identification and prevention of problems**

A few measures early on in a semester can help prevent as well as identify and quickly resolve problems.

- Early and thorough assessment, in particular of new GPT/PRRT 1 and 2 Registrars is critical, including sitting-in with the Registrar, doing joint clinics and/or video of consultations, and getting the views of other members of the team.

- Regular feedback to the Registrar is important, coupled with documented development planning and scheduled reviews.

- It is important to have explicit expectations of the Registrar. Training posts should be clear about the behaviour expected of the Registrar e.g. working hours, participation in practice meetings etc., and what the Registrar can expect from the post.

- Understand that Registrars may be going through an important transitional phase of their lives. Their background and culture e.g. a longish spell in hospital medicine, qualifying in another country, may be relevant.

- If there are problems, focus on behaviour and expected behaviour change.
• Document and share all documentation with the Registrar. In case of disagreement the Registrar can register their view in writing to be kept with the documentation.

• Seek advice and help early from colleagues in the practice and your local GMT medical educator and staff.

**Early signs of a Registrar in difficulty**

1. **The disappearing act**: frequent lateness, excessive amounts of sick leave, excessive tiredness, poor attendance at the half day release sessions.

2. **Low work rate**: running late despite an appropriate workload; coming early and staying late but still not getting a reasonable workload done; not clearing/managing results box.

3. **Anger**: bursts of temper if decisions are questioned, shouting matches with colleagues or patients, irritability, real or imagined slights, disrespectful or dismissive speech and behaviour towards patients or clinical colleagues.

4. **Rigidity**: poor tolerance of uncertainty, inability to compromise, difficulty prioritising, inappropriate or vexatious complaints.

5. **Bypass syndrome**: colleagues finding ways to avoid seeking their opinion or help.

6. **Career problems**: difficulty with exams, uncertainty about career choice, disillusionment with medicine.

7. **Insight failure**: rejection of constructive criticism, defensiveness, counter-challenge.


**Indications for immediate action and referral**

• **Patient safety** (actual act or critical near miss involving the Registrar)

• **Registrar safety** (suicide risk or significant impairment)

• **Allegations of criminal** (e.g. assault) or **professional misconduct**

Supervisors and/or practice managers should notify the most senior local GMT staff directly via phone or email, and follow this up by submitting a completed Notification of Concern Form (see page 7) with more details. GMT will keep in close contact with the practice. Supervisors should also consider their professional obligations and decide whether they should notify AHPRA.

**Process for notifying GMT of concerns regarding a Registrar**

Supervisors and practice managers are encouraged to have early contact with their local GMT office staff to raise any concerns that they have. The local medical educator is available to have confidential conversations and provide support and advice as required.
If the concern is serious and/or cannot be resolved at a local level, the local medical educator will refer the Registrar to the GMT Training Assistance and Monitoring (TAM) Committee. The TAM Committee meets regularly to discuss Registrars in difficulty and to decide on what action should be taken.

**Support for a Registrar in difficulty**

*Low level concerns*

Additional support would most likely take the form of extra ECT visits, Training Advisor contacts and targeted supervision. Registrars can be helped to more clearly focus their Learning Plan, to improve time management etc. Supervisors will be supported by their local GMT staff to identify and implement specific strategies e.g. weekly joint consultations.

*Significant concerns*

The intervention required will be tailored to address the problem. For example, practices can be financially supported to provide additional teaching.

Registrars who fail assessment items are supported via online learning groups and additional face to face teaching, as well as by their local medical educator.

Registrars with health issues will be directed to seek appropriate help.


If necessary, GMT will notify AHPRA of concerns.

**Support for Supervisors**

It can be extremely difficult to have to manage a poorly performing Registrar. Support for Supervisors in this position will be provided by local GMT node staff, Teaching Practice Engagement Officers, as well as GMT senior Medical Educators and administrative staff.

Notification of Concern – Process Summary

Concern expressed about a Registrar

- Assess the severity:
  - Patient safety
  - Registrar illness
  - Misconduct

Initial assessment by supervisory team or GMT

- Consider underlying issues
- Assess need for further information

Speak with the Registrar

- Usually done by Supervisor and/or local medical educator
- Listen and assess
- Note findings
- Agree and document an action plan with review date
- Training Assistance and Monitoring (TAM) Committee notified if appropriate

Implement action plan

- Ensure Registrar is adequately supported to successfully implement the action plan

Review

- Matter resolved or requires ongoing monitoring, review or referral

If you have a serious concern, contact GMT ASAP.
Further reading


## Notification of Concern


### Section 1 – Your Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Name and Title:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best Contact Phone Number:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Completed:</td>
<td>Time:</td>
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### Section 2 – Details of the Concern

**This notification concerns a:**
- [ ] Registrar
- [ ] Supervisor
- [ ] Training Practice

**Name of Person or Training Practice:**

Please describe your concern below and attach any relevant documentation. Please be as specific as possible. In instances of serious concern, please also contact your local GMT office by telephone prior to or at the same time as emailing this form. Any notification will be dealt with sensitively, with due care taken to ensure that the confidentiality of the parties involved is respected. Additional space is provided on page 2.

**Please indicate your assessment of priority of this notification of concern:**
- [ ] **Amber:** Issues identified. Training involvement with GMT can continue, however intervention by GMT is required.
- [ ] **Red:** Urgent Intervention is required by GMT. Their current role with TMT cannot continue without immediate review and/or intervention.

Please email your completed form to [directorgmt@jcu.edu.au](mailto:directorgmt@jcu.edu.au).

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**GMT Office Use Only**

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<tr>
<th>Date received:</th>
<th>Time received:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAM Committee Notified:</td>
<td>Date:</td>
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