

The RCOG/RCM joint statement on undermining and bullying in the workplace



Royal College of
Obstetricians &
Gynaecologists



The Royal College of
Midwives



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The RCM and the RCOG are the standard setters for their professions. By working together to reduce undermining and bullying behaviours, we are improving the working environment for our professional teams and delivering better care to women and families. Undermining behaviour can negatively affect patient outcomes and this was a major factor in the problems experienced at [Mid-Staffordshire hospital](#)¹ in nursing and the failure of maternity services at [Morecombe Bay](#)². The RCM and the RCOG together categorically condemn undermining and bullying behaviour under any circumstance.

Together we are promoting a positive working environment for all, where individuals and teams treat each other with compassion, dignity and respect, where critical feedback and whistle-blowing are encouraged, and women are central to the care we provide. A culture in which unsafe care is reported by any member of staff, independent of their seniority, will be nurtured and supported.

To address the challenge of poor behaviour in maternity and gynaecology services, the RCM and RCOG have developed a joint web-based undermining [toolkit](#)³, which provides doctors and midwives with practical advice and examples of the action they should take when they encounter bullying and undermining in the workplace. The RCOG has also developed an [eLearning package](#)⁴ – which is now freely available on our website – with interactive video-based case studies to help health professionals from all backgrounds improve how they deal with colleagues, provide feedback, and respect cultural differences.

The two colleges regularly work together to improve maternity care, for example the RCOG's [Each Baby Counts](#)⁵ quality improvement programme aims to halve the number of babies who die or suffer severe brain injuries because something went wrong in labour. The RCM is also represented on RCOG's Workplace Behaviours Network.

We strongly encourage all of our members to make use of these excellent resources – each and every one of us has a part to play in stamping out bad behaviour across our profession. Feedback suggests these resources are relevant and of high quality and impact, with 100% of users of the eLearning package saying they would recommend the resource to colleagues. We are also encouraged by the news that when action has been taken to tackle undermining and bullying in units with supportive management, positive change has been achieved ([2015 GMC Trainees Survey](#)⁶).

Dr David Richmond
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Supporting information

1. Undermining and bullying behaviour has long been recognised as a problem for obstetrics and gynaecology (O&G) trainee doctors, as evidenced by repeated national General Medical Council trainee surveys. O&G trainees report more undermining behaviour than any other medical specialty.
2. Although the GMC trainee surveys indicate that the vast amount of undermining reported by trainees is carried out by consultants, midwives are the next biggest group – 21% of undermining behaviour reported by trainees was carried out by midwives in 2009, 16% in 2010 and 16% in 2011. The questions were changed in 2012 to ask where undermining behaviour had occurred – the highest percentage of reported occurrences was in the labour ward (10.1% = 193 trainees) though these will have involved both consultants and midwives. In 2013, the question was amended to ask which group of staff were involved in undermining cases – in 317 cases, midwives were noted as the group of staff responsible (this compares with 578 for consultants) – midwives were the second highest group. In 2014 and 2015, the survey has not asked details as regards who is responsible for undermining, or where it takes place.
3. The 2014 [NHS England staff survey](#)⁷ also reveals that midwives also experience more harassment or abuse from their managers/team leaders or other colleague than nurses and midwives combined (28% compared to 24%), although this was down from 31% compared to 27% in 2012.
4. In 2012 the RCOG decided to take specific action to reduce the undermining experienced by O&G trainees, building on the previous joint RCOG/RCM work in 2008 ([the Clinical learning environment](#)⁸). The two workshops were held in 2013 and 2014, resulting in this joint statement and the content for the undermining toolkit and e-Learning package. A joint action plan was also agreed.

References

1 <http://www.midstaffspublicinquiry.com/report>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/morecambe-bay-investigation-report>

3 <https://www.rcog.org.uk/underminingtoolkit>

4 <https://stratog.rcog.org.uk/tutorial/online-resource-improving-workplace-behaviour/introduction-11482>

5 <https://www.rcog.org.uk/eachbabycounts>

6 http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/national_summary_reports.asp

7 <http://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/Page/1019/Latest-Results/Staff-Survey-2014-Detailed-Spreadsheets/>

8 <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/the-clinical-learning-environment-and-recruitment---report-of-a-joint-working-party/>

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