



## mentor maladies

### **How do I react to an unsympathetic, unhelpful or even bullying mentor on placement? (Question posed by a first year nursing student.)**

First off, it's important you have support and some frame of reference from someone else, probably a peer in the same department, so that you can make sure your perception is right and decide if you have a genuine problem. Having external support from a friend, trusted colleague or personal tutor will also help if you're not getting enough support and encouragement on the placement itself.

Give the relationship a good go, everyone has their off day or week, and some relationships need a bit of extra grace and time. You could encourage things along by discussing your needs, your required learning outcomes and competencies for that placement and asking your mentor to plan for it together. It might help focus them! Try where possible to talk through the problem with your mentor - they may not always realise the impact their behaviour is having on you. Keep a written record of what was said, in case the problem doesn't go away.

If the situation doesn't improve and you feel you're not learning and being given opportunity to acquire key skills, and so can't meet your placement competencies, explore the option of changing mentor with the ward manager or whoever is responsible for organising the mentor.

Unfortunately a few mentees I've met have felt bullied by their mentor, and it's a real confidence knock, often at a vulnerable time. Issues constituting bullying may include being

consistently rude to the student, not being truthful about the student and their abilities or deliberately not signing placement documents.

In these cases, you should speak to the ward sister and your personal tutor. *The Student Nurse Handbook* has a helpful chapter on mentors, in which it says, even as a student nurse, you may have to 'whistleblow' if you feel something or someone is wrong.<sup>1</sup>

The RCN has a guide for nursing students, *Dealing with bullying and harassment*, in which they suggest you keep a written record of incidents with dates and location, nature of incident, your response and feelings at the time, whether you took any action and what, and the names of any witnesses.<sup>2</sup> This can be therapeutic for you, and can help clarify exactly what's happening. If you decide later on to make a formal complaint, this diary of events will also provide vital evidence.

Having an unsupportive or bullying mentor can cause anxiety, self-doubt or a lack of confidence, all of which are valid reactions. Find one or two trusted Christian friends to pray with you and encourage you, and help you turn to the Lord for strength and affirmation through this experience.

*For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.* Isaiah 41:13 ■

#### REFERENCES

1. Siviter B. *The Student Nurse Handbook*. Birmingham: Balliere Tindall, 2013
2. Working Well Initiative. *Dealing with bullying and harassment: A guide for nursing students*. Royal College of Nursing; 2005

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