

safeguarding everyone

Many of us will be familiar with safeguarding in a medical, church or youth work context



At first sight, some might think there should be little need for formal safeguarding within an organisation like CMF. We have limited dealings with children, and most of our adult members would not usually fit the profile of a 'vulnerable adult'. Yet according to NHS England's definition, safeguarding extends beyond this, to protect all citizens.

NHS England defines safeguarding as follows: *'Safeguarding means protecting a citizen's health, wellbeing, and human rights; enabling them to live free from harm, abuse, and neglect. It is an integral part of providing high-quality health care. Safeguarding children, young people and adults is a collective responsibility.'*¹

a Christian duty

It is easy, particularly for healthcare professionals and students, to think of safeguarding as something that is part of work; another box to be ticked, yet another piece of mandatory training to complete.

Yet recent history has made clear that Christian organisations across denominations are not free from safeguarding concerns. Poor safeguarding practices are often picked up in case reviews, with one recent example citing 'lack of value placed on safeguarding'.² Safeguarding issues can arise whether an organisation is Christian or not.

Indeed, for a Christian, protecting the most vulnerable should always be more than a legal and



Laurence Crutchlow is CMF Associate Head of Student Ministries and a GP in London

statutory exercise. *'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'* (Matthew 25:40) Safeguarding should simply be an expression of our concern for the most vulnerable we come across.

what about CMF?

We might not want to think of CMF as a place where power is exercised, but inevitably there are some power dynamics in an organisation like ours. However much we encourage humility and fellowship, the medical hierarchy still exists. We rightly respect and hope to learn from our older members, but this creates uneven relationships between more senior and more junior members. There is some necessary hierarchy within the CMF staff and volunteer team to ensure that the organisation can work properly.

None of these things in themselves might meet legal thresholds for being 'safeguarding', but this does not mean that we should not take care that our structures do not unwittingly create situations where abuse of power occurs. Matthew Amer's article in this edition is quite clear that some power dynamics will be present even in a student group. 'Spiritual abuse' has been widely discussed in recent years, and it is important that our internal culture minimises the likelihood of this happening.

actions as student members

It can be hard to separate our role in healthcare (where, even as a student, we are expected to escalate safeguarding concerns) from that in church, CU, or CMF. If we hold a formal role outside our day-to-day work, we should be familiar with safeguarding procedures in that organisation and make sure we have undertaken any training required.

Within CMF, the staff and formal volunteers use a safeguarding policy and have access to a safeguarding lead with whom we can discuss any problems. While members do not have this level of accountability, it is easy to envisage a situation

where, for example, a student link becomes aware of someone who may be in an abusive relationship, perhaps finding out because of providing prayer or informal support.

The exact right and wrongs of what to do legally are complex (and indeed assuming you are dealing with a competent adult, there is often little that can be done if they do not consent to be helped). You do not need to take on this burden (even when the 'healthcare' part of you may be tempted to do so), but it is important that you share concerns, rather than try to take responsibility for managing them yourself.

however much we encourage humility and fellowship, the medical hierarchy still exists

If the issue has arisen within a CMF context, the best action would be to speak to one of the Student Ministry team (which can be done without identifying the person involved initially); we can then discuss internally utilising our safeguarding support services as necessary, not only to make sure CMF fulfils our legal obligations, but also so that we can suggest the most appropriate organisations or people that may help locally. If you are a student union affiliated society, they will also have policies you need to follow. Of course, if someone is in immediate danger, your first response should be to call the police rather than the CMF Office.

If thinking through this issue has left questions or concerns, please contact one of the Student Ministries team. If you feel you need more personal support, the Pastoral Care and Wellbeing team (contact via cmf.org.uk/doctors/pastoral-care-and-wellbeing-programme) might well be able to help initially and signpost you to other suitable services. ■

REFS

1. NHS England. england.nhs.uk/safeguarding/about
2. Independent lessons learnt review concerning Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Church Wimbledon. 2021. bit.ly/3Xf12u6