Ten ways to raise concerns

If you have concerns about anything that could have a negative impact on the wellbeing of people you look after, or your colleagues or yourself, there are many ways to raise them. Only you can judge which is most effective in your situation. However, whatever means you use, it is important to keep good records every step of the way. If your concern is not recorded somewhere, then there may be no evidence you ever raised it. Provided you are very careful not to compromise confidentiality, especially of patients, it can be a good idea to keep copies of relevant documents at home.

**Informal discussion followed by an email**

A starting point is often to raise a matter informally, in a corridor conversation, on the ward, in the lab, or at a health centre, with your manager. Who knows, that might be enough to sort it out! It’s a good idea to follow up with a short low-key email confirming the concern you wish to raise, the clarification you seek, or the action agreed in the conversation.

**In a formal discussion followed by an email**

If your concern or your situation make an informal discussion inappropriate, you might need to arrange a formal meeting with the appropriate representatives of your employer. In seeking such a discussion, you might set out your concerns in writing, or it might sometimes be better to place them on the record in an email afterwards, possibly by suggesting towards the end of the meeting that you will write to set them out with any evidence. Alternatively, before the meeting ends get joint agreement on what will happen next and what (if anything) had been agreed.

**In an email**

If you raise your concern in email -- or if you follow up a conversation or meeting with an email -- it is important to spell out the specific risks to patients or service users rather than make general comments about matters being “unsafe”. Sometimes it can be more appropriate or effective to raise your concern as a question and ask for advice on how it should be addressed.

**In a meeting, such as a team meeting**

Raising a concern during a team meeting can have a double benefit because others may chip in and corroborate your views or endorse your concerns. If so make sure those concerns are recorded in any minutes or drop your manager an email confirming
them afterwards. And if others don’t share your concerns, it’s best to know where you stand. Make sure your concern is recorded appropriately in the minutes. If it is not, or if it is recorded incorrectly, then send a low-key note to everyone at the meeting with your suggested wording.

**In the notes of supervision**

Your employer’s clinical supervision policy will normally require that key concerns and outcomes are recorded and agreed. If they are not, or not accurately, again correct them with a low-key email.

**In an incident report**

Your employer will have procedures for logging incidents, near misses, concerns and risks. Precisely how this is done may vary so you will need to check your local procedures for:

- Notifying untoward incidents
- Logging near misses
- Asking that concerns be placed on the clinical risk register

Make sure you keep a copy of any report you make.

Many NHS Trust incident alert systems (e.g. Datix) now alert managers if they have been notified of an incident and have not yet responded.

**In a health and safety report**

Anything that poses a reasonably foreseeable risk should be risk assessed. This applies whether it is a concern about workloads, equipment, stress, working alone in the community, and so on. Any member of staff is entitled to ask if a risk assessment has been, or will be, undertaken. Alternatively, a health and safety representative can ask. Your local policy should explain how.

**Through a grievance**

If your efforts fail to produce an appropriate and timely response then you may need to lodge a grievance. If you do, make sure you clearly set out why you feel other ways of raising your concerns have failed, what your grievance is, what evidence you have (at least the summary), and what you want to achieve. Check what your employer’s procedure says about who the grievance goes to, what deadlines exist for providing evidence, any restrictions on witnesses etc.

**In a formal whistleblowing claim**

This should your last resort, either because other means have failed or because the matter is so urgent it needs to avoid the usual timescales. If you make such a claim, it is very important that you set out:

- What your concerns are about
- Why a whistleblowing claim is necessary
- What risks you are identifying
- What you want done

Before making such a claim, it is essential to take advice, having consulted your employer’s policy. If you are not sure if your concerns are covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act see our advice on Whistleblowing.