

## **Reducing the Risk of Conflict of Interest for Advisors and Campus Directors**

College advisors and campus directors have an important role providing counseling to medical students. Some also serve in other educational leadership roles such as course directors, clerkship directors, program directors and small group leaders. The Curriculum Committee and School of Medicine believe that these leadership roles enhance the function of the advisors, the advisory college and campus directors. There is a concern, however, that these leadership roles may themselves be perceived as a conflict of interest by students, undermining the effectiveness of the counseling role. This policy lays out the School of Medicine's guidelines and procedures for mitigating this risk.

We distinguish among academic, career, and personal counseling to medical students. Academic counseling is counseling to help students improve their performance in medical school and may include help with test-taking skills, advice on preparing for USMLE Step and NBME shelf examinations, and suggestions on methods to study more efficiently. Career counseling is counseling to give students guidance in selecting a specialty and preparing for the Match and may include help with planning for the summer following first year, help with Careers in Medicine activities, advice on scheduling fourth year and selecting electives, and feedback on CVs and personal statements. All students participating in the Match are required to meet with one of the Advisory College faculty to discuss their fourth-year schedule, selection of electives, and preparation for the residency application process. Once students entering the Match have made a specialty choice, career counseling is provided by Career Goal Advisors, faculty in each department designated to help students seeking to match in that specialty. Personal counseling is counseling aimed at helping students adjust to the psychological and emotional demands of medical school and may include advice on ways of balancing personal needs with professional responsibilities, as well as advice on wellness issues and health promotion. In practice, personal counseling ranges greatly in sensitivity and seriousness.

We have established the following guidelines:

- a. Advisors and Campus Directors should be aware of the potential perception of conflict of interest. Students will be informed of this issue at the beginning of medical school and again when they are considering their career plans and the MSPE.
- b. Faculty advisors or campus directors should not establish a doctor-patient relationship with their medical student advisees and should never provide psychiatric /psychological counseling or treat sensitive health issues. Examples of psychiatric /psychological counseling are counseling focused on the evaluation and management of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders, and learning disabilities. UNC SOM students needing inpatient psychiatric care will be admitted to the inpatient psychiatric unit at the Duke University Medical Center, if space is available. Other sensitive health issues may include reproductive health and cancer diagnosis and management. If such issues arise, advisors and campus directors should refer the students to appropriate campus services.

- c. Faculty in each Advisory College will function as a dyad and will cover for each other on an as needed basis. For example, if a student is not comfortable with his/her college advisor, for any reason, the student will be able to speak to the other faculty member in that college. In the event that for any reason, the student is not comfortable with either of the advisors in their college, the student may speak with a faculty advisor from a college other than his/her own. In addition, students may at any time contact the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, the Educational Resources Coordinator, and/or the SOM Registrar, who has formal training in counseling.
- d. In order to help students match and graduate successfully, all students are required to have a Fourth Year Advising Meeting with their assigned College Advisors during their third and fourth years so that the Advisors can help the students with career decision making, planning the fourth-year schedule including selection of electives, and completing the residency application process. In addition, the students must meet with their departmental career advisors.
- e. MSPEs are drafted by the Staff Writer using the student's *curriculum vitae*, transcript, preclinical small group seminar and CSD/CSI comments, clinical comments, and permanent record. All Medical Student Performance Evaluations (MSPEs/Dean's Letter) are reviewed and signed by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Students will choose whether or not the MSPE is reviewed and signed by their College Advisor, or the Associate Dean for Student Affairs alone. In the spring or summer prior to submitting their residency applications, students meet with the Staff Writer to review their MSPEs. At this meeting, students inform the Staff Writer as to their preferences regarding who should review their MSPE and whether or not there are members of the Advisory College faculty that the student does not want to review their MSPE. Students will not be asked to give a reason, but possible reasons for requesting that a college advisor not review and sign an MSPE include the fact that the student has disclosed sensitive information to the advisor in the past, the student has concerns regarding a particular advisor based on one of the advisor's other roles, or the student plans to request that the advisor write a letter of recommendation in support of the student's residency application. MSPEs will be reviewed and signed by the student's assigned faculty advisor unless the student indicates to the Staff Writer that this is not his/her preference.
- f. Campus Directors provide academic and career counseling for students at AHEC sites. They may do some personal counseling as well, but must not provide psychiatric/psychological counseling or treat sensitive health issues. They should arrange appropriate referrals in these cases. An individual not involved in teaching medical students will be available to provide personal counseling to students at AHEC sites and may serve as an ombudsperson for the purpose of discussing student mistreatment. In addition, students at AHEC sites may contact the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, the Educational Resources Coordinator, and/or the SOM Registrar.