

completed for all trials, investigators would be asked to include a copy of the completed form with their application for approval. Once the form had been processed by the registry office the trial would be considered registered.

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## References

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3. Regional Office for Europe, World Health Organization: *Drug Information: Report of a WHO Meeting, 16-18 October 1991* (EUR/ICP/DSE 168), WHO, Geneva, 1992

## "Abuse" in medical school?

The essay "Differences in abuse reported by female and male Canadian medical students" (*Can Med Assoc J* 1994; 150: 357-363), by Drs. Rebeka Moscarrello, Katalin J. Margittai and Miriam Rossi, would have been far more useful if the nature of each incident of abuse had been described. A mere catalogue of types of abuse doesn't help one understand the problem or learn how to prevent it.

What is verbal abuse? Does it mean being sworn at? Should we abandon the spoken word as a means of discipline? The concept of emotional abuse eludes me; a description of it would have been helpful.

Does sexual abuse mean an overt attempt at unwanted sexual intercourse, a leer or a friendly hug? The only abuse the authors investigated that is understandable to me is

physical abuse, which I believe includes forceful blows, kicks or stabs. It is difficult for me to believe that a hospital staff member, intern, resident or nurse (a woman, in my old-fashioned male mind) would do such things to a person of either sex. Some examples of these incidents of abuse would have been informative.

Also, the authors should have included a copy of the questionnaire. Without it, readers can't interpret the message.

I worry that we are becoming so obsessed with "abuse" that we can't see the forest for the trees. If the problem of abuse of medical stu-

dents exists I hope that the authors will write another essay describing the nature of this abuse and giving suggestions for prevention.

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[The authors respond:]

Although Dr. Harris refers to our article as an essay it was accepted and published as a report of original research. Therefore, the article meets broader criteria than those defined by an essay, "a literary composition usually dealing with a subject from a limited or personal point of view."

Table 1: Types of abuse before and during medical training at the University of Toronto reported in February 1991 by first-year and fourth-year medical students in response to the question "Have you ever experienced any of the following?" on the Medical Student Abuse Survey questionnaire

Type of abuse	No. (and %) of respondents (n = 347)
<b>Verbal</b>	
Yelling or shouting directed at you	77 (22.2)
Humiliation or put-down (disparaging remarks about being in medicine etc.)	116 (33.4)
Racial or ethnic discrimination (slurs, jokes, prejudiced remarks etc.)	84 (24.2)
Clearly unhelpful comments, unconstructive criticism, threats to your academic standing (threatening to fail you, to lower your grade, to give you a poor evaluation etc.)	86 (24.8)
Threats to your physical integrity (threatening to hit you, to cause others to harm you etc.)	6 (1.7)
<b>Emotional</b>	
Prearranged time for teaching not followed up or cancelled by intern, resident or staff physician	115 (33.1)
Being assigned work or duties for the purpose of punishment rather than for educational value	25 (7.2)
Having others take credit for your work (papers, projects, clinical work or research)	42 (12.1)
<b>Sexual</b>	
Being stared or leered at, ogled; unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, innuendos or taunting remarks about your body, attire, age or marital status; malicious gossip pertaining to your sexual habits etc.	53 (15.3)
Use of sexist teaching material; display of pornographic, sexually offensive or degrading pictures	42 (12.1)
Sexual advances; unnecessary physical contact (touching, pinching, patting etc.)	25 (7.2)
Sexual intimacy with or without actual intercourse; exchange of rewards for sexual favours	2 (0.6)
<b>Physical</b>	
Pushed, shoved, shaken or tripped	15 (4.3)
Slapped, hit, punched or kicked	17 (4.9)
Assaulted with a "weapon" (needle, surgical instrument etc.); objects thrown at you	4 (1.2)