

Raising concerns case studies

Case study 2: Acute setting

Peter is a registered nurse. He has been working in an acute medical ward in a large NHS trust since he qualified 12 months ago. He works regularly with Joan, a junior sister, and considers her to be a friend. A month ago, Peter noticed that Joan had begun to treat everyone in an off-hand way. Peter did not mind for himself but began to worry about the effect on patients. Peter heard Joan shout at some patients and then one day he found out that Joan was sedating a confused elderly patient without a prescription. Peter tried to speak to Joan but Joan's only response was that the doctor would prescribe it soon anyway and that she was just giving everyone a bit of peace.

A few nights later when this patient got out of bed talking loudly and obviously in a state of confusion, Peter saw Joan pushing her aggressively back to her bed. She pulled the curtains round the bed, and Peter then heard screams followed by moaning sounds from the patient.

Stop here

Ask staff what they think Peter should do.

The following day one of the doctors that Peter knew from another area was visiting the ward and Peter mentioned to him that he was worried that a colleague was being rough with patients. The doctor said Peter should report it and told him he could get confidential advice from his trade union or Public Concern at Work (PCaW).

At first, Peter was unsure whether he could talk to his manager, who was very friendly with Joan, and was worried about what would happen if his concerns were unfounded and if other colleagues took sides against him. He liked working there and hoped to stay on the ward for a couple of years.

Stop here

If Peter's manager did not take his concerns seriously or took no action, what steps might Peter take next.

Peter decided to call his trade union and following discussion, Peter agreed that his manager would take issues of care seriously. His union suggested Peter should ask to meet his manager privately to explain his concerns. The next day Peter spoke to the manager and as a result, an immediate investigation was started.

Though initially denying a problem, other staff began to describe incidents that Peter knew nothing about and Joan was suspended. The police were called in and ten months later Joan was convicted and jailed for two years.