

Guidelines for Managing Learners in Distress

June 2025



Toronto
Metropolitan
University

School of
Medicine

Land Acknowledgement

Brampton and its surrounding area, the Peel Region, are part of the Treaty Lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We acknowledge that these lands are also the shared space of Anishinabek, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Ojibway/Chippewa and Métis peoples.

We honour the Indigenous peoples who cared for this land for thousands of years before us, and commit to valuing the Two Row Wampum. This Living Treaty represents settlers and Indigenous peoples moving forward together, in parallel, respecting each other's ways of being, knowing and doing.

We honour the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, and in this spirit we strive to treat the land and people of our community with mutual respect, taking only what we need and sharing what is available to ensure sustainability for those that follow us.

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Signs of Distress

Learners may manifest signs of distress during their medical education journey. They are often navigating multiple stressors such as:

- Interpersonal strains
- Being away from home
- Academic pressures
- Loss of personal supports
- Career choice decisions
- Financial challenges
- Uncertainty
- Loss of personal supports

Learners may have difficulty coping with these stressors. Learners between the ages of 18-25 years old are in an transition stage where first onset of mental health issues can manifest for example:

- Depression
- Anxiety disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Substance
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders

Faculty and staff of the TMU School of Medicine who work with learners may find themselves needing to support and manage a learner in distress. TMU Student Wellbeing has developed resources and an approach to managing a learner in difficulty or in distress. In addition, we would like to provide some supplemental information tailored to the TMU School of Medicine.

Note that if a faculty member or staff have concerns about a learner, they are encouraged to approach the Learner Affairs Unit (LAU). Alternatively, they can approach other SoM Academic leadership (e.g., Associate/Assistant Deans/Program Directors; see contact information below). If you are unsure, please feel free to contact Learner Affairs (contact info below). When you reach out for assistance, we will do our best to get back to you in a timely fashion during work hours within 24 hours. Learner Affairs is at arm's length from academics, and preserves the learner's confidentiality, barring certain exceptional circumstances.

We are grateful to our Student Affairs colleagues at McMaster University School of Medicine for providing the framework for this document.

Learners with an Emergency Concern

Examples:

- Presentation/information suggests acute risk to self or others
- Learner presents an acute risk in providing care to patients
- Learner is acutely confused or unwell.
- Learner is acutely intoxicated.

1. Consider the degree of emergency. Does 911 need to be called or the learner taken to the ER if you are in a hospital setting?
2. If you are able to do so prior to dealing with the learner, notify your Program Lead (i.e. Course lead, Phase lead, Program Director, AD UGME/PGME Deans, AD Learner Affairs) of the situation to discuss and create a plan.
3. Notify the learner that you have urgent concerns and are going to help the learner.
4. If you are in a hospital setting and this is a health emergency, accompany the learner to the emergency room of the hospital.
5. If you are in the community and this is a mental health concern, call 905 278-9036/1-888-811-2222
6. If you cannot wait or cannot reach the local Crisis service, call 911.
7. If the learner is not with you and you have urgent concerns related to mental health, call 911 or the local Crisis service. Make sure you have the learner's address where they currently are. If you need their home address, this can be obtained by calling the UGME or PGME offices during office hours.
8. If the learner is not with you and you have urgent concerns related to other health issues, call 911. You will need the learner's address. Their home address can be obtained from the UGME or PGME office (during office hours).
9. When able, call/email Learner Affairs for support and planning or debriefing depending what stage you are at.
10. If there is a concern of risk to the learner, patients or others, in addition to notifying Learner Affairs, the Program leader should consider notifying the UGME or PGME leads and consider debriefing with them at a later date.

LAU Contact Information

*****If your situation is life-threatening, please call 911 immediately*****

Learner Affairs Unit	Title	Name	Phone #	Email
Learner Affairs Unit Contact Information	Assistant Dean Learner Affairs	Dr. Stephanie Milone	416-542-5890 ext. 541020	smilone@torontomu.ca
	Manager, Learner Affairs	Katherine Gittins	416-542-5890 ext. 541020	kgittins@torontomu.ca

Crisis Contacts *Please see full contact resource list below in "Appendix Resources"*

Brampton	Mobile Crisis of Peel (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon)	905-278-9036 or 1-888-811-2222
Ontario	HERE 24/7 Crisis Line	1-844-HERE247

Learners with an Urgent Concern

Examples:

- The learner presents with an acute health issue. (This can also be a newly revealed health issue or evolving).
- The learner presents with acute distress that requires removal from their setting.

1. Approach the learner ASAP in private and express your concern.
2. If you require support or anticipate a challenge, ideally discuss the issue beforehand with Learner Affairs and/or your Program lead.
3. Given this is an urgent situation, involve Learner Affairs ASAP. Call the Learner Affairs Unit to see if someone is available to see the learner promptly or to communicate concerns.
4. It is important to let the learner know what you are doing and keep them in the loop.
5. Encourage the learner to connect with Learner Affairs on their own.
6. If you feel the learner needs to be assessed fairly quickly (or if Learner Affairs is not available for immediate support), please encourage the student to contact their primary care provider. They may need to go to the nearest ER/urgent care clinic if indicated and available.
7. The Program lead may want to consider notifying the UGME or PGME leads and consider debriefing with them at a later date

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Learners Requiring Support

Examples

- The learner in distress (e.g. poor performance on an assessment, struggling academically, new stressor)
- The learner experiencing an interpersonal conflict (e.g. peer or patient negative interaction, harassment etc.)

1. Approach the learner at a convenient and private time to express your concern.
2. Explain why you wish to speak with the learner. Describe what you observed and your interpretation.
3. Be clear that you are NOT asking confidential details about their personal life/personal health information/health care or diagnosis. (These are all confidential)
4. Listen actively and openly. Offer support while trying to understand the learner's perspective/interpretation of the situation of concern.
5. Make the learner aware of specific resources available to support the learner as needed.
6. Remember to advise the learner of Learner Affairs availability for support and encourage the learner to contact the LAU.
7. Encourage the learner to seek support from other resources - family, friends, peers, their own health care provider etc.
8. If you feel it would be helpful to notify the Learner Affairs Unit, let the learner know you will be doing that.
9. If you are unsure of how to manage the situation, ensure the learner does not have urgent needs first then call the Learner Affairs Unit for support and guidance.

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Appendix: Quick Reference to Resources

Contact Information

Title	Title	Name	Contact Information
TMU School of Medicine	Assistant Dean Learner Affairs	Dr. Stephanie Milone	smilone@torontomu.ca 416-542-5890 ext. 541020
	Manager, Learner Affairs	Katherine Gittins	kgittins@torontomu.ca 416-542-5890 ext. 541020
	Associate Dean, UGME	Dr. Dorothy Bakker	bakker@torontomu.ca
	Associate Dean, PGME	Dr. Valerie Mueller	muellevm@torontomu.ca
	Family Medicine Director of Wellness; Director of FM Clinical Sites	Dr. Alessandra Palombo	alessandra.palombo@torontomu.ca
	Manager Clinical Education	Meghan McCauley - Brown	meghan.mccauleybrown@torontomu.ca
OMA Physician Health Program	The Physician Health Program (PHP) Provides a range of direct services to physicians, residents, and medical students as well as supportive services to respective family members	N/A	php@oma.org 1-800-851-6606
William Osler Health System	Vice President, Academics	Dr. Hemant Shah	TBA
Headwaters Health Care Centre	Senior Administrative Assistant supports Medical Affairs Office	Liane Manifold	Lmanifold@headwatershealth.ca 519-941-2410 ext.2217
Trillium Health Partners	Manager of Education	Bryan Abankwah	bryan.abankwah@thp.ca
Halton	Halton Education Coordinator	TBA	TBA

TMU Downtown Campus	TMU Centre of Student Wellbeing	TMU Centre of Student Wellbeing	https://www.torontomu.ca/student-well-being/counselling/ 416 - 979 - 5195
	TMU Human Rights Service	TMU Human Rights Service	humanrights@torontomu.ca 416-979-5349
	TMU Office of Sexual Violence Support	TMU Office of Sexual Violence Support	osvse@torontomu.ca 416 979 5000 ext. 553596

Appendix 2: Crisis Resources

Crisis Contacts

Title	Name	Contact Information
Ontario	Professional Association of Residents of Ontario (PARO) 24hr Confidential Help Line	1-866-HELP-DOC http://www.mvparo.ca
	Suicide Crisis Line A safe space to talk, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.	9-8-8 https://talksuicide.ca
	Good2Talk Free confidential support service for post secondary students in Ontario	1-866-925-5454 https://good2talk.ca/ontario/
	HERE 24/7 Crisis Line	1-844-HERE247 1-844-HERE247
	Telehealth Ontario	1-866-797-0000 https://health811.ontario.ca/static/quest/home
	Kids Help Line Kids Help Phone is available 24 hours a day to Canadians aged 5 - 29 years who want confidential and anonymous care from professional counsellors.	https://kidshelpphone.ca
	Hope for Wellness Help Line Available to all Indigenous Peoples across Canada who need immediate crisis intervention. Experienced and culturally sensitive helpline counsellors can help if you want to talk or are distressed.	1-855-242-3310 https://www.hopeforwellness.ca
Brampton	Mobile Crisis of Peel (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon)	905-278-9036 or 1-888-811-2222
Dufferin Caledon	Canadian Mental Health Association Distress Line	1-844-437-3247 https://cmha.ca/find-help/if-you-are-in-crisis/

	Canadian Mental Health Association (incl. addictions) 24/7 Crisis Team	1-844-437-3247 https://cmha.ca/find-help/if-you-are-in-crisis/
Mississauga	Mobile Crisis of Peel (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon) Immediate crisis outreach and support for individuals aged 16+, who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Team made up of mental health workers and plain-clothes police officers trained in mental health crisis intervention. Phone line is answered by a mental health crisis worker 24 hours-a-day, 7 days a week. Mobile visits available	905 - 278 - 9036 https://cmhapeelddufferin.ca/programs/24-7-crisis-support-peel/
Peel Region	Peel Crisis Service (Age 16+) 24-Hour, 7 days per week	905-278-9036 Toll Free: 1-888-811-2222 https://cmhapeelddufferin.ca/programs/24-7-crisis-support-peel/
	Assaulted Women's Helpline 24-Hour, 7 days per week Provides crisis counselling, emotional support, information and referrals to women in up to 154 languages .	1-866-863-0511 awhl.org
	Crisis Shelters 24-Hour, 7 days per week Crisis shelter and supports for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	peelregion.ca/housing/shelters

Online Resources

Please consult (and refer students to) these links for additional resources which are MD-program specific:

- Learner Mistreatment [UGME](#) and [PGME](#) policies
- [Learner Mistreatment form](#)
- [TMU School of Medicine Learner Services](#)