

Why have an Ombudsman?

As a resident, you will have many support systems in place if or when you feel overwhelmed or conflicted with work.

First line supports may include: your colleagues, your family, and your friends

Second line supports may include: your advisor, your program director

Third line supports may include: your family doctor, the ombudsman

This order is arbitrary however, it is important for you to recognize that there are many paths to well-being, with the Ombudsman being one of these.

What does an Ombudsman do?

An ombudsman (and yes it is ombudsman not ombudsperson: a word taken from a Swedish term and is a gender neutral term in Sweden)

- helps resolve problems and concerns of all visitors
- provides feedback to an institution regarding themes in order that there could be potential for organizational change

How does this happen?

By meeting with an ombudsman, visitors have an opportunity for their concerns to be heard and for potential action to occur. All steps taken are done so with the acceptance of the visitor however, should safety be a concern then confidentiality is no longer valid. Potential additional action of an ombudsman could be

- negotiation
- mediation

What are the principles that the ombudsman works with?

It is important to understand that the ombudsman works under a certain structure of principles. These are:

- independence
 - an attempt is made to make the ombudsman independent in structure, function and appearance to the best degree possible in the structure of the residency program
 - this is important because the ombudsman's goal is to be non-judgmental and without interest
 - this allows issues that might otherwise remain hidden come up to the surface and be addressed
- confidentiality
 - there are limitations which include imminent risk of serious harm, compliance issues, organizational specific expectations
 - when a visitor tells the ombudsman something, this is not necessarily telling the organization (the concept of independence)
- neutrality
 - is defined as not taking part in either side of a dispute or quarrel
 - Impartiality means favouring no one side or party more than another, without prejudice or bias...

- the goal is that all parties should be treated equitably and biases need to be put on the table
- informality
 - listens, provides and receives information
 - identifies and reframes issues
 - develops a range of options for resolution
 - seeks resolution
 - the ombudsman does not conduct investigations or replace formal channels
 - rather the ombudsman reports on trends, uses and concerns
- privilege
 - this is the right to refuse to divulge information obtained in a confidential relationship

So why would I visit an ombudsman?

As a resident in an organization, you work with all kinds of people under all kinds of circumstances. It would therefore not be uncommon that you might clash or come in conflict with another person's ideas or actions. This may cause you stress, worry, anxiety. This may lead to you feeling burnt out, not invested, discouraged, angry, and unhappy or other feelings.

Coming to visit with an ombudsman is an opportunity to lay out your concerns and then problem solve with the ombudsman with respect to any action steps you think might be helpful in order to make situations, feelings, ideas more tolerable.

The ombudsman might outline suggested next steps. In the end the decision to move forward is up to you (unless of course there are safety issues). The ombudsman will keep a record of trends and issues however, will not speak with anyone about your concerns unless you specifically give consent for this to happen.

In the end, this is an opportunity for you to get support. What you have to say, how you feel matters.....

Your Ombudsman is

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