

Wrongfully taken to court

Intimidated and anxious – ReMed offers support

Doctors who are wrongfully accused of medical errors and taken to court can suffer from this stressful situation - even long after their acquittal. ReMed, the support network for doctors in crisis situations, offers professional help to relieve the concerns of those affected and restore confidence in their own abilities.

On one's own

"The contemptuous and aggressive tone of the prosecuting lawyer's statements during questioning was almost the worst part of the entire business. It triggered the start of a severe and enduring lack of confidence and anxiety, even though I knew rationally that the lawyer had deliberately twisted the facts and that he was unable to accuse me of any actual medical errors. And it was clear to me that the lawyer's calculated, overbearing powers of persuasion would affect not just me.

From then on I lived in trepidation, not only fearing the loss of my licence and the related social and financial consequences. Even worse, every morning when I entered my practice I had the feeling that I could do nothing, was a failure, and was incapable of treating my patients competently. Apart from the lawyer who represented me at court, I was unable to talk to anyone openly about my worries. My marriage suffered heavily from my desperate mental state during these five stressful years. I was too ashamed to seek professional help and preferred to treat myself with doses of Lexotanil and antidepressants."

Only some ten years after her acquittal did my GP colleague reveal to me this sad story of being falsely accused of a medical error which led to a year-long court case. She then asked me what ReMed could have offered her in her situation.

Discussion with a trusted member of the medical profession

ReMed is a low-threshold point of contact that offers support to doctors in crisis. At the time of the initial contact, they discuss with a member of the Management Committee the best possible and most suitable form of support to provide. Our GP, for example, could have obtained supervisory support in her practice and rapidly regained confidence in her own abilities. In addition, regular discussions on protracted, stressful and highly unsettling experiences with a member of the medical profession can also prove beneficial to affected doctors. In this context ReMed offers experienced and appropriate professional support, for example from a network of members of ReMed peer counselling groups.

Doctors can also suffer from trauma due to the severe stress of protracted legal disputes and the related anxiety. If necessary, ReMed offers professional support in the form of treatment, both during or after a difficult situation. We have learned from many discussions that the persistent stress suffered by colleagues who have been accused of medical error and become embroiled in legal proceedings still affects them long after their acquittal.



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Anxiety: a constant companion

"It's easy to downplay the pressure caused by the ongoing stress of a year-long court case. At some point I was no longer able to cope with the anxiety. For example, finding another letter from the lawyers in my mail would trigger severe tachycardia and hypertension.

But symptoms of anxiety and depression were only part of it! The case dominated my entire life and dogged me every minute of the day. The continual attempt to ignore it cost me an incredible amount of effort. It would have been helpful if a colleague had provided professional support and could also have advised me about medication."

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