

# Managing exception reporting through communication and engagement

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Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

## What was the problem?

Imperial College Healthcare was concerned that junior doctors might be reluctant to submit exception reports when their working hours or rest periods did not meet their contractual arrangements, or they could not access the educational opportunities, specified in their [work schedule](#).<sup>1</sup> The exception report is sent to the consultant reviewer allocated to each junior doctor (who may be the educational supervisor, unit training lead or another designated consultant, depending on the specialty). A copy is sent to the director of medical education (for training issues), or guardian of safe working hours (for safety issues) or both, to address the issues raised.

## What was the solution?

It was important to emphasise the guardian's neutrality, independence and commitment to ensuring the trust meets the safety aspects of the junior doctors' new contract. The trust wanted junior doctors to feel able to raise concerns and work with it to rectify issues. The aim was to ensure rota designs were fit for purpose and the process for submitting and responding to exception reports was well understood.

The trust worked with junior doctors, consultants and the education team on rota redesign. Its improvement team ran two workshops to design exception-reporting governance and guidance documents, using quality improvement methodology to map the exception reporting process. This was refined at weekly meetings of the junior doctor contract implementation group. Rota co-ordinators also worked with doctors to ensure the rotas worked well.

**Junior doctors' evening engagement events:** The trust hosted three events for junior doctors at three main sites. They were held in the evening and hot food was provided to maximise attendance. As well as junior doctors, the chief executive, executive team members, divisional directors, medical director, guardian, senior clinicians and senior HR representatives attended. These were open forums for junior doctors to discuss concerns about the new contract. They covered the exception-reporting system, new rotas, timelines for implementing the contract, the guardian's role and the aims of the junior doctors' forum.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/contracts/junior-doctor-contract-2016/work-scheduling>

**Quality and safety subgroup:** The subgroup's monthly meetings monitor two key performance indicators for exception reporting to ensure (a) a response within days and (b) analysis of trends or repeated problems, with action taken accordingly. For example, junior doctors reported having to routinely stay beyond their rostered hours to bleed patients, so the trust increased phlebotomy services. The director of medical education and unit training leads also analyse exception reports to ensure training is not affected.

**Junior doctors' forum:** The trust anonymises and shares exception reports at the monthly junior doctors' forum, and works with junior doctors' representatives to address highlighted issues. The forum explored three exception reporting software packages, and with junior doctors selected the one that worked best at the 'front end' and 'back end'.

**Exception-reporting guidance:** The trust produced guidance for junior doctors, educational supervisors, departmental and divisional leads on managing exception reports, including action to be taken, making it available to all on the trust intranet.

## What were the challenges?

As exception reporting was a new concept, it was important to create a clear process as well as clarify the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved.

## What were the results?

The trust has few exception reports compared to the number of junior doctors it employs and compared to neighbouring trusts.

## What were the learning points?

Discussing issues in the junior doctors' forum allowed the trust to respond to concerns about rota gaps or access to educational opportunities. Junior doctors' representatives highlight best practice elsewhere; Imperial follows up to see if it can implement similar solutions.

## Next steps and sustainability

The trust intends to move to the Allocate exception-reporting system to help identify rota gaps and analyse trends or repeated problems.

## Want to know more?

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