

## Inquiry into work place bullying

Dear Members,

I enrolled in a PhD and the first few years were busy but enjoyable. The next were very difficult primarily due to 2 academics and the inaction of the University. The University has never been proactive and would rather deny the existence of a problem, frequently not responding to emails. Indeed the only time any action is taken is when my medical defence union is involved or I threaten to involve the medical board.

In brief the difficulties I experienced included but not limited to:

1. Additional funding being sort to extend a study. Academics, not employed at the same institution, were the primary names on the grant as the initial researchers were not eligible to apply. These new academics had not been involved in the initial study and I was not aware of the specific grant application. When the grant was successful these academics informed me they would be taking years of my work and I could ask their permission to use it. I understandably declined and this began a tirade of poor conduct.
2. In a second study I was harassed to bill for investigations being undertaken for research, which is fraudulent. I also had to step in and stop medical tests being undertaken in an unsafe manor, both for study participants and staff. I was essentially left to manage these issues alone.

Subsequently there was a concerted campaign to vilify and bully me both verbally and in writing. Emails were written and circulated widely including but sadly not limited to:

- a. My being mad and should be removed from the study;
- b. Threats of being "reluctant to crucify my career";
- c. Questioning my medical abilities;
- d. Accusing me of stealing data (a falsehood later acknowledged).

In fairness my supervisor did try to manage this initially and later involved the head of department and I was referred up the chain, but there was little will to

act at any level. I reported what I believe constituted bullying and abuse only to be “patted down”. The University were reluctant to undertake any investigation reporting it was too hard. I insisted pointing out it was an obligation not a choice. In the end the University concluded that the behaviour was of “concern” and that the employing institutions had been spoken to. I was not satisfied and approached the employing institutions directly, neither were aware of the issue. The conduct has continued and the University has never put in place any strategy to manage this or my wellbeing, but have continued to “collaborate”.

More recently the University has insisted these individuals be given authorship on a number of publications despite their having no involvement in the early study. I did not believe they met authorship criteria. Authorship criteria are very specific and require a substantial intellectual contribution in a number of areas of the work and the contribution to be documented. Publications are important as ‘track record’ is used a substantial part of assessment to allocate further funding, public and otherwise. I again raised concerns with the University who reluctantly investigated and produced a report. I demonstrated that the claims of contribution, to support authorship, in the report were incorrect with supporting evidence. The university had little choice but to repeat the report and concluded they were authors but declined to tell me what the fulfilling contribution was, essentially they were unaccountable. I wrote to the but this is not in their terms of reference.

Another difficulty for the University is that the subsequent large funding for this study is held by another institution. The University is well aware of the conduct of these individuals, nor do I believe the University believes they fulfil authorship criteria; but their longer term relationship with these research institutions are more important than their duty of care to me. My understanding is this is not an unusual scenario.

My main concerns are the culture and the practice of turning a blind eye to appalling conduct because individuals are successful at obtaining grants and funding. Secondly, the lack of inclusion of “students” in workplace legislation; higher degree students can spend years in a work environment, albeit not in a paid capacity. Finally our Universities and research institutions are largely self regulating and unanswerable.

My last three years at the University were nothing short of harrowing. I would not wish the same experience on anyone, yet these individuals continue to research and continue to obtain funding. Combating bullying is really a cultural issue in any workplace. While difficult it is nevertheless critical as the impact on individuals, let alone overall productivity, is enormous and outcomes at times tragic. I applaud the House’s efforts to investigate this difficult issue and hope effective solutions can be found. I also believe we need further investigation into funding and accountability in our research institutions as current process and the large cross institution collaborations are becoming more common and necessary making these issue more challenging to manage.