

# THE ISSUE OF BULLYING

In March 2017, APEX carried out a survey of our RT members to assess and understand workplace culture and the prevalence of inappropriate behaviours. The survey asked questions on:

1. Prevalence of bullying and inappropriate behaviours in the workplace.
2. Incidents of employees reporting bullying behaviours to the employer.
3. How the professional and private lives of employees are affected after experiencing bullying behaviors.

## Results of the RT Members Survey

Forty-one percent of our RT members participated in the survey. Of those members, 35% said they had experienced bullying in accordance with the definition. Furthermore, 73% had witnessed a colleague being subjected to bullying or inappropriate behaviours in the last 6 months. Yes, bullying is a problem for RTs!

We asked members to clarify the main perpetrators (bullies); 29% identified lead RTs, 23% management and 52% other RTs.

Peer-bullying can occur just as much as bullying from your manager, and demonstrates the endemic nature of the problem. The mantra of “being nice to patients and not so nice to each other” unfortunately rings true.

Of those that had been subjected to inappropriate behaviours, 41% said they had reported it. Those who had not reported said that this was mainly due to a lack of faith that the complaint would be

dealt with appropriately. One participant said “there was no point in reporting it as I would face repercussions. I reported an act of violence a few years ago and was told it was more or less justified as I pissed the person off.” Another said of their report that “management swept it away, there was no accountability and I was alienated by staff.”

### AN ENDEMIC PROBLEM

It appears that in the health system, bullying and inappropriate behaviours have become endemic. In these circumstances, it can be very difficult to change the culture, and even to get complaints taken seriously and acted on. Making a complaint is difficult, but also crucial; nothing changes unless we take action. We all have responsibility here – and not only to the victims. No one wants to work in toxic workplace where bullying is rife.

### THE MIDCENTRAL STORY

Last year the delegates at MidCentral DHB decided to take action. They committed to supporting their colleagues who were the victims of bullying and ensuring that DHB management took their complaints seriously.

They raised bullying/inappropriate behaviours as serious health and safety issues that needed to be addressed in accordance with the Health and Safety in Employment Act.

It was an exhaustive and difficult process. However, the persistence of the delegates convinced the DHB. They agreed to commission an independent investigation into the workplace culture of Radiation Oncology. All staff were interviewed and the majority took the opportunity to provide constructive feedback.

[Click here for Worksafe NZ's excellent tool-kit on workplace bullying and what to do if you're subjected to inappropriate behaviour.](#)

The investigation concluded that while providing good service, the workplace culture was under pressure and change was needed.

A number of areas for improvement were commonly identified by interviewees and resulted in recommendations. These will, we hope, prevent or mitigate inappropriate workplace behaviour/bullying, lead to progressive cultural change, assist the professional development of RTs, and make the department a better place to work. This can only be good for both patients and RTs.

The RTs are enthusiastic and committed to ensuring that the recommendations are implemented and the outcomes realised. APEX will be supporting them through this important process. Big ups to the MidCentral delegates for your tireless work and for making this happen!



### WHAT IS BULLYING?

Workplace bullying is defined as unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that leads to physical or psychological harm. Bullying behaviour is:

- **Repeated.** It's persistent, occurring more than once.
- **Unreasonable.** It includes actions that a right-thinking person in the same circumstances would see as unreasonable. It includes victimizing, humiliating, intimidating or threatening a person.
- **Variable.** The behaviour can involve a range of actions over time, and may include harassment, discrimination or violence.

# PART-TIME WORKING & FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

**A**s we all know, work-life balance can be difficult to achieve. While you might have been employed full time originally, full-time work might no longer be an option. We might have responsibilities for children, want to study, or just no longer want to be at work so much.

APEX is often approached by RTs and asked, "What do I need to do to get the DHB to agree to changes in my hours/days of work?" Just as common is: "If my employer refuses a request to change to part-time hours of work, what are my options?"

## GOOD FAITH

Unfortunately, employers can refuse such requests. Your employer should in 'good faith' tell you the reasons why, but they might just say "part-time employment isn't our preference."

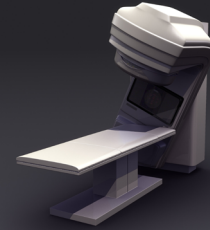
Employment Relations Act, any employee can ask at any time to change their hours of work (over a day, a week or year), days of work, or how work is performed (eg, location). A request for a flexible working arrangement needs to be put in writing by the employee and then carefully considered by the employer. They are required to respond within 1 month and, if declined, the employer is required to explain fully the reasons and justify (ie, provide evidence) why the request cannot be accommodated. This makes it much harder for an employer to simply say "no" – and they cannot say no on the basis of just not wanting part-time employees!

## MAKE IT CLEAR

The clearer and more detailed the request the better, and the more difficult it will be for the manager to decline. It is up to the employee, though, to explain the working arrangement they want and how it can be made to work for both employee and employer.

## WELCOME!

Welcome to the first issue of the APEX newsletter dedicated to our Radiation Therapist members.



This newsletter aims to bring together relevant information and news for our RT members. We'll push this communication out once a quarter (approximately), although with some flexibility according to the issues at particular times.

If you have ideas for content, or would like to comment, please get in touch with us at [rt@apex.org.nz](mailto:rt@apex.org.nz).

a good idea to suggest how the changes could be beneficial for the service or accommodated by the service.

The employer will make the decision of whether or not to grant the request based on service grounds rather than personal circumstances.

## TEMPORARY? PERMANENT?

The DHBs are in most instances agreeing to time-bound flexible working arrangements (usually over 12-24 months). However, flexible working arrangements can be permanent. Stipulate what you actually want at the time you apply.

Be aware: Some DHBs are actually *requesting* RTs who have permanent fixed-hour arrangements (such as permanent part-time) to apply for flexible working arrangements on a fixed-term basis. Theoretically, this would then allow the DHB to revert them to full-time when that arrangement expires. *This shouldn't happen*. Flexible working arrangements are to change hours of work, not maintain them. Furthermore, they are to benefit employees and not employers: employees should be the ones requesting them, not the employer.

A [handy checklist](#) on what to consider in a flexible working arrangement application is found on the [Employment New Zealand website](#).

Please email [rt@apex.org.nz](mailto:rt@apex.org.nz) if you have any questions.

work | life  
balance



Unfortunately, the lack of flexibility shown by some DHBs in allowing part-time employment has led to the profession losing some excellent RTs.

## SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Applying for a flexible working arrangement will, in most circumstances, be a better option than asking to reduce hours (especially if you know they might be reluctant to agree). Under the

When you explain the changes you're asking for, you should also explain any changes that management might need to make if they agree to the request. It's

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