

"I would do something if I could!": experiences and reflections from ethics teachers on how to respond when hearing alarming cases from medical students

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Abstract	<p>Background Previous studies show that teachers can feel disturbed by alarming cases brought up by students during their teaching activities. Teachers may feel uncertain about how to deal with these cases, as they might feel responsible to take action to prevent further harm. This study aims to explore how ethics teachers in medical schools would respond to a student report of unethical or unprofessional behaviour during the clinical training phase (clerkship) that is alarming and potentially harmful for patients or students themselves. Methods This study used qualitative methods with purposive sampling. We conducted in-depth interviews with 17 teachers from 10 medical schools in Indonesia. We asked if they had heard any alarming and harmful cases from students and provided two cases as examples. Results Four teachers shared their own cases, which they perceived as disturbing and alarming. The cases included power abuse, fraud and deception, violation of patient's rights and autonomy, and sexual harassment. Regarding teachers' responses in general, we found three main themes: (1) being assertive, (2) being careful, (3) barriers and facilitators. Most teachers were convinced of the need to take action despite numerous barriers, which they identified, leading to doubts and concerns in taking action. Our study shows that formal education in ethics might not necessarily influence how teachers respond to alarming cases, and that their responses are mainly influenced by how they perceive their role and responsibility as teachers. Conclusions Our study suggests that teachers should carefully consider the risks and consequences before taking action upon alarming cases to prevent further harm, and that support from higher authorities might be crucial, especially in the Indonesian context. Our study also shows that taking action as a group might be appropriate in certain cases, while personal approaches might be more appropriate in other cases. Most importantly, school leaders and administrators should develop effective organisational culture and support students and teachers for their ethical responsibility commitment.</p>
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