



Worth
more than
2 hours



Worth More Than 2 Hours Writing to a Medical School

Writing to a medical school

Choosing who to write to

The best person to contact about the campaign will vary between medical schools. There may be different routes to the right person, and you may not find the most receptive person straight away. A good start would be the Psychiatry lead or the curriculum development lead, but you could also write to your Dean or Programme Director.

Before you write your letter, we can update you on **any contact** we have had with the medical school so far. Be sure to keep your letter clear and concise – aim for a maximum of one side of A4.

Identify the problem

Introduce yourself and the problem. You can talk about the general lack of eating disorder training in medical education and your experiences on the training, or lack of training, on eating disorders at your institution:

- Training on eating disorders in medical schools is minimal and on **average**, medical students receive **less than two hours** of training on eating disorders.

You can talk about prevalence of eating disorders, bust the myth about who they can affect and explain the impact they have on those affected:

- At least **1.25 million (or 1 in 50) people in the UK** have an eating disorder.
- Eating disorders affect people of any **age, gender, ethnicity or background**.
- People with eating disorders can develop severe physical health problems and without **early intervention**, many become unable to participate in education or employment.
- **Full recovery** from an eating disorder is **possible**.
- Eating disorders have extremely high mortality rates: **anorexia** has the **highest mortality rate of any mental illness** and **one in six** of those ever affected by binge eating disorder attempts suicide.

Identify the problem (continued)

You can talk about what a lack of teaching on this means for both doctors and their patients, particularly **how poor or delayed treatment impacts recovery**. This will help to demonstrate the need for the changes you are calling for:

- People with eating disorders will not necessarily go to their GP about their eating disorder, and so **all doctors need to have training on eating disorders**.
- Eating disorders are **serious illnesses**. Doctors don't currently have the training to ensure that they have **sufficient knowledge and the confidence to treat people with eating disorders**. This gap in training is leading to **delays in people getting access to the treatment that they need and risking lives**.

If you have personal experience, you may wish to share this - it is of course completely up to whether you feel comfortable sharing personal experience. There is more information about this on [page 8](#).

Identify the goal

What would you like to happen? You can talk about the kind of training that would be useful and flag any specifics that might have been unhelpful in the training you have received. Or you can ask for more information about how they currently teach eating disorders.

You may have suggestions for local collaborations to deliver training and you can let them know about the new training package that has been developed by Beat, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and Health Education England. The training will support medical schools to provide 7 hours of education on eating disorders to fourth year medical students (some of which is self-directed study). The package is available free of charge to all UK medical schools and can be accessed [here](#).

The General Medical Council published outcomes, which all medical students are expected to meet. Many of the themes in the outcomes are relevant to eating disorders (especially outcomes 7, 10, 14, 23 and 25) so the training will support this.

Show the wider support and need for change

You can explain that there is academic and political support for increased training. Our briefing contains some links to relevant reports that you may want to reference, such as the 2017 PHSO report '[Ignoring the Alarms: How NHS eating disorder services are failing patients](#)', which found that current medical training on eating disorders is lacking, and called for a review of training and for improvements to be made. You can also reference some of the investigative reports that have highlighted that this is an area that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

You may wish to approach others within your institution who are passionate about this issue and encourage them to co-sign your letter or to write their own letter. You could approach medical societies such as nutrition or psychiatry, mental health societies, or the Beat society if your University has one.

Be open and honest about your connection to the Beat campaign on this, we have written to all medical schools, so mentioning this will help demonstrate that we are united in our calls for change.

You may want to finish your letter by asking for a meeting to discuss the issue. This can help to bring the reality of the situation to life and you can answer any questions they may have/ be sure to include your contact details.

After you have sent your letter

It can take time to receive a response, so be patient. You might need to show some positive persistence; if you have not heard back in a few weeks, send an email, or call them via telephone to follow up. You may receive a response which directs you to another person or doesn't give you the response that you were hoping for, but remember that there are many different people who you can contact next.

Remember, if you need any help you can contact Beat's campaigns team via campaigning@beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

Preparing for a meeting

Know the issue

Be sure that you know the issue. You can do this by reading the Beat briefing and, if you have time, the research and reports referenced in the briefing, such as the PHSO report, '[Ignoring the alarms: How NHS eating disorder services are failing patients](#)'. Try to find out about what your school is doing either by online research or talking to other students.

You can look at the information Beat has published on your medical school's training on their website and you can also talk to the Campaigns Team at Beat for more information on previous communication with your medical school. Beat can help you prepare and gather information in advance and can help you answer questions after the meeting. Just get in touch with the team by emailing campaigning@beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

While it's good to be prepared for meetings, you don't need to have all of the answers. It's okay if you're not an expert on eating disorders, or if you don't know where the training could fit into the curriculum. The most important message to get across is that more needs to be done to improve medical training on eating disorders.

Prepare an agenda

Find out how long the meeting will last. Make a clear plan of what you want to cover and how you'll structure your time. Allow time for discussion and questions. Having this agenda and any information you wish to refer to during the meeting printed for yourself is a good idea.

- The beginning – Introduce yourself and explain why you have arranged the meeting.
- The middle – Try to stick to your agenda, keeping your points clear and concise to ensure you get time for discussion and questions. It can be useful to have some statistics, but try not to rely on them completely, as this can be impersonal. The person you are meeting might have a different view to you, so it's important to get your views across while listening to what they have to say. If they have any tricky questions, don't worry if you can't answer. You can only speak about your own experiences. Tell them you will find out the answer and send them further information (Beat can help with this).
- The end – Explain what can be done to improve the situation and ask them to take action. It can be helpful to prepare a handout with your key points, so that you can leave this with them, or have a follow up email ready to go.

If you are attending the meeting with another person, agree your roles in advance. Discuss who will say what and how you can best support each other. It is also courteous to let the person you are meeting know who will be attending with you. Practise before the meeting by spending some time going through what you plan to say. This will help you to feel more confident when speaking during the meeting.

Guidance if you plan to disclose that you have had an eating disorder

If you have personal experience of an eating disorder, sharing your story can be a really powerful way to inform and persuade those with responsibility over medical school, curriculums, teaching and assessment. However, you can still be an active and effective campaigner without sharing your story and **you should only ever share your story if you feel comfortable to do so.**

Medical schools have a responsibility to listen to the views and concerns of their current and former students. The GMC states that medical students with mental health conditions, including eating disorders, have a duty to be open and honest about their health and therefore should disclose their condition to their medical school. The '[Supporting medical students with mental health conditions](#)' guidance published by the GMC and the Medical Schools Council states that medical students may have higher instances of mental health conditions compared to those in similar areas of study. Moreover, medical schools have obligations to provide support to students with eating disorders and to provide reasonable adjustments.

What to do if your medical school isn't responsive

Don't worry if your medical school doesn't reply right away or are initially dismissive. There are lots of different ways that you can influence your medical school:

1. Try emailing again if you haven't received a reply after a few weeks (university faculties are often very busy and they may not have seen your email).
2. Ask some other people from your course to email as well or to add their names to your email, to show that there is greater support for the campaign.
3. Talk to your personal tutor. Let them know that this is something that you are passionate about and ask if they have any advice on steps you could take.
4. Reach out to the Psychiatry academics at your university and ask if they would be willing to support the campaign.
5. Reach out to student societies that might be able to help you, such as the Medical Society, the Psychiatry Society or the Beat Society (if your university has one).
6. Reach out to your Students' Union, they exist to represent you. You could ask them to support you in reaching out to your Medical School. Some Students' Unions have a Welfare Officer who you can reach out to and if yours does not then you could reach out to a different Students' Union Officer.
7. You could even try writing to your Parliamentary representative (your MP, MSPs, MSs or MLAs) to ask them to support you with this, you can find guidance on how to do this [here](#).

These are just a few ideas and remember we are always here to help!