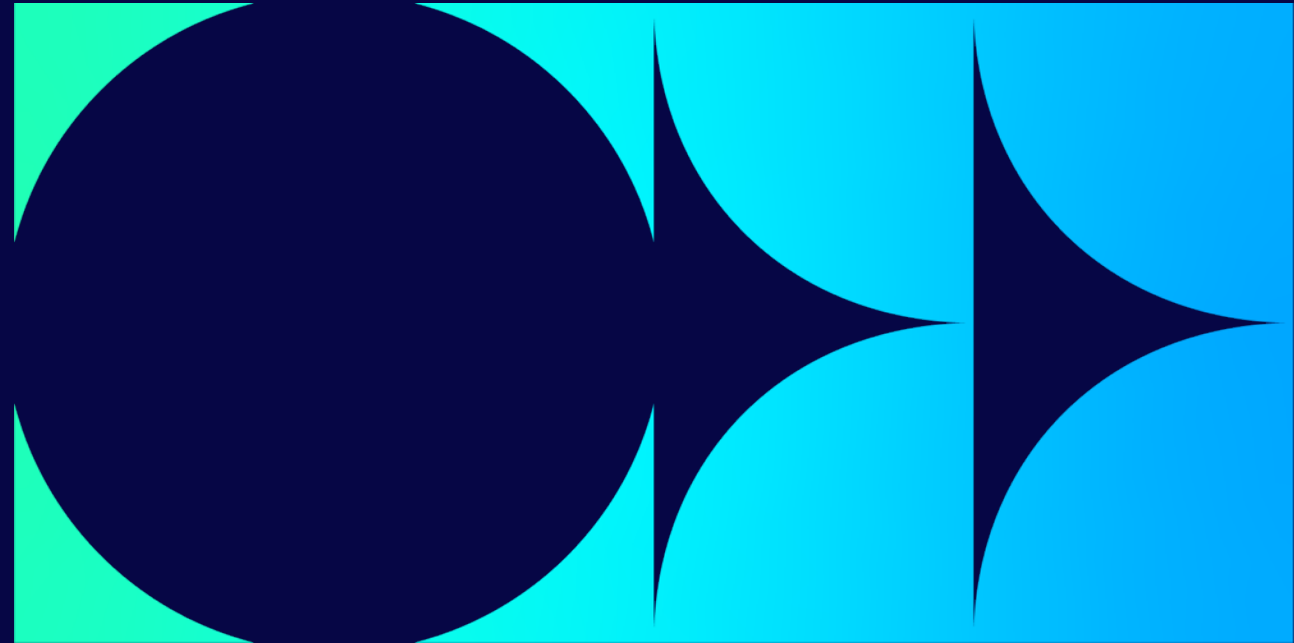


'Witness to Harm, holding to account'

Improving patient, family and colleague witnesses' experiences of Fitness to Practise proceedings: A mixed methods study

Part 2: Better witness care



Interlude 6: N's Story- WHAT WORKS

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO BETTER PREPARE AND SUPPORT WITNESSES?

This story includes an account of sexual abuse. It raises points about the difficulty of reporting and what worked for her with the regulator.

Note what support the regulator offered for discussion.

Presenter- whole story from 00 to 05.58 the end . Audio only.

Witness to Harm

N's Story



DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS:

Consider her prior trauma and needs for support:

- What seemed to work well?
- What could regulators and panels do to better support a witness?

RE TRAUMATISATION OF WITNESSES

What do we mean by Trauma?

“Individual trauma results from an **event**, a series of events, or a set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has long lasting **effects** on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual wellbeing”

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014)

We recommend trauma informed practices should be adopted by regulators, as SSSC and some other regulators have already begun to do so.

Summary of draft recommendations

- Developing an understanding of public witness perspectives and needs
- Recognizing different ways witnesses can be (situationally) vulnerable - assesses these needs and acting on them throughout
- Providing information in ways a wider public can understand
- Communicating – by all staff with compassion, using principles of trauma informed practise to reduce potential, re-traumatization and distrust
- Training panel members in witness perspectives, impact of trauma on giving evidence, and how they can better intervene / set the tone for cross examination in hearings.
- See NHS Education for Scotland (<https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/our-work/trauma-national-trauma-training-programme/>),
- Reduce and be mindful of the “work of public witnesses”, and express how valued their contribution is. Provision of support by regulator at all stages and after the hearing
- Consideration of witness impact statements
- Provision of independent advocacy / navigation support

Selected publications

NIHR report: : <https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr/SSPP1118>.

Wallace L, Ryan S, Searle R, Hughes G, Sorbie A, Ryan-Blackwell G, *et al*. Witness to Harm - Holding to Account. Improving patient, family and colleague experiences of Fitness to Practise proceedings: a mixed-methods study. *Health Soc Care Deliv Res* 2025;13(44). <https://doi.org/10.3310/SSPP1118>

Witness vulnerability:

Sorbie A & Garripa L(2024) (Re)constructing “witness vulnerability”: An analysis of the legal and policy frameworks of the statutory regulators of social work and social care in the UK. *British Journal of Social Work*.00,1-19 <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcae185>

<https://wels.open.ac.uk/sites/wels.open.ac.uk/files/files/AS%20%26%20LG%202024bcae185.pdf>

See full list:

<https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/projects/witness-harm-holding-account/resources/publications>

<https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/witness-harm-holding-account>

Our public resources are available on these websites:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/>

<https://healthtalk.org>

PSA blog- <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/news-and-blog/blog/detail/blog/2024/04/04/customer-care--personalised-care---it-s-just-not-good-enough.--more-compassion-is-needed-in-complaints-handling>

Contact: louise.wallace@open.ac.uk



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh Law School

Developing the animations with expert input



We surveyed GDC and GPhC panel members attending panel training in Autumn 2025 about **good practice** in witness care to derive the 7 challenges. Trainers may choose to use **one or all** of the most relevant.

We created a **beta version** shared with regulator trainers, selected panel chairs, lawyers and senior FtP executives / heads in the GDC, GOsC, and the Teaching Regulation Agency. This preview session is our **final animation** based on feedback on our beta version. We used the **feedback** to make some updates, e.g. emphasizing FtP processes and support may differ across regulators, appropriate questioning techniques, demonstrating trauma informed practice (covered more in the trainers' notes).

We have produced a **training guidance / resources** document which **can be** added to / amended. 26 attendees in preview sessions from regulators and law firms gave feedback on both the animation and trainers notes. The training guidance will be amended based on preview session feedback so that the animation can be used effectively. It will also be updated periodically with other resources.

Aims

To prompt reflection around preparation, questioning, emotional responses, and the overall witness experience and to help panel members think more deeply about their role in reducing harm and supporting witnesses effectively.

Link with other training e.g.,
trauma informed practices,
special needs - case law,
regulator support offer.

There are **no**
right answers!
Only better
practices.

The 'Seven Challenges' & appendices

1. Preparing for hearing with a vulnerable witness
2. Introducing the witness
3. Witness is upset
4. Witness becomes incoherent
5. Repetitive cross examination
6. Panel member questions
7. The end of witness evidence

When watching the animation please consider:

- How and why the scenario might be useful in panel training
- What kind of impact this training will have on regulatory processes more generally?
- How might you or other stakeholders use these scenarios?
- Which of the scenarios stand out in particular?

{Link to animation removed}

What the guidance contains

- The 'Seven Challenges' prompts and guidance on context
- Appendices: Top tips handouts
 - A: Preparing the witness & reasonable adjustments
 - B: Trauma informed language
 - C: The window of tolerance
 - D: Appendices: Resources / handouts
- Feedback and key contacts

What other resources / guidance would be helpful to include?

Next steps

- We plan to launch the animation and trainers notes on our website in June/July 2026. Prior to this, we can make early release for use by regulators on an agreed basis: [contact louise.wallace@open.ac.uk/ gemma.ryan-blackwell@open.ac.uk](mailto:contact_louise.wallace@open.ac.uk/gemma.ryan-blackwell@open.ac.uk)
- There will be trainers notes and self study version.
- We are also planning a short animation of “Top Tips” for witnesses to self manage their emotional experience before during and after a hearing . This complements the texts and videos most regulators and some lawyers already provide. This will be free to use and we welcome regulator adoption.
- I can provide information for newsletters and other events if you plan to use our resources.

EVALUATION

The PSA will invite you to fill in an on line survey (10mins max) about this session. *This entirely voluntary, anonymous, your responses will not be identified to you, and will not be shared with the PSA.*

<https://forms.office.com/e/XQTb4gjTsk> -

If you are interested in completing and giving feedback on the Open Learn FtP course, we offer a voucher of £25 if you then complete a survey or interview afterwards.

Contact louise.wallace@open.ac.uk

Q & A : Over to you



Thank you

