Objective: The position of Ombudsman for Graduate Medical Education (GME) was developed to promote a positive climate for residency and fellowship education. The Ombudsman will serve as an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource for residents and fellows with training-related concerns.

Background: A need existed to have an official, impartial party who could act as a resource for residents with complaints or concerns regarding training-related issues. A Program’s Director and Coordinator, while advocating for residents/fellows, must also consider what is best for the program. The GME Office Director and staff and GME Dean oftentimes must remain a neutral party regarding trainee complaints and concerns. The primary role of the GME Office and Dean is to ensure that policies and procedures are followed. Therefore, an Ombudsman can serve as a resource for residents and fellows by listening to issues, providing resources and advice, and by working alongside the GME Office and GME Dean to resolve conflicts.

Goals:

- Provide a safe and confidential opportunity for residents and fellows to be heard
- Assist in identifying options and providing resources to manage and resolve concerns
- Educate about policies and procedures regarding GME
- Refer individuals toward appropriate formal processes and resources
- Facilitate communication between conflicting parties (often in conjunction with the GME Office and GME Dean)
- Report to the GME Office and GME Dean regarding confidential recommendations regarding operations/systems/policies/processes that could implement change to improve the training environment
- Share feedback about trends and concerns that would be important for GME to be aware of
- Provide residents and fellows an advocate during any program, staff, or disciplinary action to ensure that the resident is being treated fairly and that policies and procedures are being adhered to

Ombudsman Appointment:

- An Ombudsman for non-surgical specialties who understands non-surgical specialties, department functions, and the role of residents and fellows in those specialties, and an Ombudsman for surgical specialties who understands surgical specialties, department functions, and the role of residents and fellows in those specialties will be appointed. The two Ombudsman cannot be a Program Director or Department Chair which might conflict with their role as a resident/fellow resource
• The Housestaff Council will recommend (by popular majority vote) the two faculty members considered and the Dean and GME Dean will review and approve the Housestaff Council’s candidates
• The Ombudsman will serve a term of 2 years, with an unlimited number of terms available
• The Ombudsman will be oriented to their role by the GME Office Director and GME Dean

Ombudsman Guiding Principles:

• Confidential:
  1. The Ombudsman will maintain the privacy of the identity of residents, fellows, and faculty, as well as the content of their conversations. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm, and where there is no reasonable option other than disclosure. Whether this risk exists is a determination to be made by the Ombudsman.
  2. With the resident’s/fellow’s permission, the Ombudsman may contact individuals within the institution whose help is necessary to resolve a problem.
  3. The Ombudsman does not keep records containing personal identifiable information.
  4. The Ombudsman does not testify in formal proceedings.
  5. The Ombudsman does not make reports to the School of Medicine or GME Office, although they may inform regarding areas of concern and opportunities for improvement.

• Neutral:
  1. The Ombudsman helps ensure that due process is adhered to
  2. As residents/fellows hold positions of lesser authority within organizations, the Ombudsman may serve as an advocate or resource. For example, the Ombudsman may offer feedback, information, advice, and/or referrals. Such service provides education and will provide residents/fellows a sense of empowerment and reduce stress, frustration, and helplessness with workplace issues. The Ombudsman remains neutral in all dealings
  3. The Ombudsman will be allowed to be present during ALL disciplinary hearings and can take action to ensure that the resident is being treated fairly in all proceedings
  4. Support will be performed in a fair, non-partisan, reasonable, and compassionate fashion
  5. The Ombudsman would be free of any consequences from providing support and resources for a resident/fellow. It is not appropriate for other faculty or administrators to bully the Ombudsman. Such behavior will be reported to the GME Dean.

• Independent:
  1. The Ombudsman has no authority to make decisions on behalf of a program, the GME Office or the institution.
  2. The Ombudsman provides assistance, education, referrals and feedback

• Informal:
1. The Ombudsman engages informally with visitors and will not retain written records due to confidentiality

**Ombudsman Services:**

- Residents and fellows may seek guidance on matters related to: academic issues, administrative policies and procedures, employment questions, disciplinary matters, interpersonal conflicts, harassment, discrimination, work environment issues
- The Ombudsman may: provide options for resolution of conflict, identify or clarify issues and next steps, share information and options, clarify policies and procedures, provide resources for referrals to formal channels for investigation, make referrals, share resources for support, attend disciplinary meetings to ensure adherence to policies and procedures

**Services Not Provided:**

- The Ombudsman will not perform formal investigations, offer opinions on administrative decisions, or participate in any formal grievance/complaint proceedings
- Notices to the Ombudsman does NOT constitute legal notice to the GME Office or University
- Ombudsman services are meant to supplement current grievance and complaint reporting and resolution mechanism, not replace them
- The Ombudsman keeps no official University/GME records

**Contact the Ombudsman:**

- Contact information will be available on the GME web page
- Contact the GME Director if questions
- No records will be kept of Ombudsman referrals

*Adapted from the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, University at Buffalo, New York GME Ombudsman document

Approved by GMEC on 6/19/14