

7 Minute Briefing

7. Questions to consider

How would I respond if a friend called and asked for advice about their child or vulnerable adult?

Am I aware of advice and guidance around this area, and how I would apply it in day-to-day practice?

6. Support resources

GMC Good Medical Practice (Domain 1):

[Domain 1 - Knowledge skills and performance - GMC \(gmc-uk.org\)](#)

MDDUS - Risk: treating colleagues:

[Risk: Treating colleagues | MDDUS](#)

MDU – Giving informed advice to colleagues:

[Giving informal advice to colleagues - The MDU](#)

5. Top tips (from MDDUS 'Treating colleagues' – see above)

- Advise friends or relatives to seek advice from their own healthcare professional where possible.
- In an emergency situation, carry out a quick clinical risk assessment and provide minimal treatment to make the patient safe until further help can be sought from an appropriate healthcare provider.
- Follow regulatory guidance on treating family & close associates, as well as guidance on maintaining adequate records

1. Background

Medical professionals can often be approached for informal advice by friends, relatives, and colleagues outside of work.

Keep in mind that 'There is no such thing as an informal opinion' *Dr Edward Farnan, MDU medico-legal adviser*

Whilst a medical professional may be 'off-duty' there is always a professional duty of care.

2. Why it matters

Offering an informal opinion or providing advice in the absence of all the information that you would usually have to hand, without seeing and examining the patient as you usually would in clinical practice, could lead to inappropriate reassurance, misdiagnosis, or other adverse outcomes.

3. Key Messages

Approach any request for advice from friends or family with the same professional expertise & judgement as you would when dealing with any other patient.

Be aware of potential conflicts between your roles as relative or friend and medical professional – professional judgement may conflict with emotional judgement, and advice or reassurance may not be objective.

4. When asked for advice:

GMC Guidance states (*Good Medical Practice para 16g*): 'In providing clinical care you must...wherever possible, avoid providing medical care to yourself or anyone with whom you have a close personal relationship'.

Consider:

- The information you don't have – relying solely on your friend or relative to provide clinically relevant information, without a full history, clinical examination or observations will make giving informed advice challenging.
- Documentation - any interaction with a 'patient' should be documented – not only for continuity of care, but from a medicolegal perspective if evidence is required for defence in a claim or regulatory complaint.

