Dear Alice,

How does one go about communicating negative feedback about one of the Health Services psychiatrists to appropriate administrators? I notice in your responses to similar queries that you refer to negative experiences as “bad matches” which have nothing to do with “our highly-trained, sensitive professionals.”

Everyone I know who has seen this man has complained of his indifference, his inability to remember their names, his evident boredom and impatience, etc. When I mentioned my concern to some Health Center doctors, they remarked that they had heard this before, this is common knowledge, etc. How does one communicate a healthy concern without being stigmatized as an unstable neurotic who can’t differentiate between a rotten therapist and a bad match?

?Healthy and Really Pissed

Answer

Dear Healthy and Really Pissed,

It is quite understandable that you would feel incensed after your concerns were dealt with dismissively, especially following sessions you found so disappointing. Health Services does take your concerns seriously and relies on student feedback about the quality of care they receive. At this point, there are a few different approaches you could take to voice your displeasure, which will hopefully lead to resolution and/or improvements in future care.

Meeting with the Director of Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) at Columbia would be one way to take your concerns to the top, so to speak. To make an appointment with the Director of CPS you may call x4-2878. If this seems intimidating, or if you would prefer to operate through a different department, you may be more comfortable visiting the Ombuds office to discuss your experiences with CPS and the subpar psychological services you received. Another option would be to see the dean or your advisor at your school. The dean’s office is open to students’ concerns, big and small, so bringing this grievance to the attention of your academic advisor dean would be well within your right.

Wherever you end up taking your case, you may want to think of some ways to prepare, so that you can honestly air your experiences and suggest changes. Making a list of the concerns you have is a great way to record your concerns on paper and view them completely and objectively. Try to keep your tally of concerns from becoming personal attacks against the
specific psychiatrist you mentioned, even if this person is the source of your displeasure.

Capturing the ideas and experiences of other people you suspect may have had similarly discouraging experiences will also be helpful in making a calm and collected case. Perhaps one of these people with similar experiences may want to accompany you in this meeting, to appear as a unified front. If you are worried about getting upset during the meeting you arrange, it may be a good idea to have a supporter in the room with you, such as a friend or person with similar concerns. And if the idea of meeting with an administrator or director seems too overwhelming, never underestimate the power of a well-crafted letter or email to convey your disappointment.

As a consumer of psychiatric care, your concerns matter. Expressing your concerns may help resolve matters for you; in addition, others seeking care in the future may benefit from your tenacity in speaking up. Take care,

Alice!
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