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ASA

Clinical Supervision

A Guide for Trainees

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Overview

This guide is intended for a sonography trainee, student, or learner, providing them with guidance as they work towards professional competency. It offers an overview of expectations for clinical supervision in supporting effective practice and explores the benefits and tools available to aid learning and professional conduct. This guide aims to help trainees navigate their training effectively, develop essential clinical skills, and prepare for a successful career in medical sonography. ASA Clinical supervision – A guide for trainees is designed as an additional resource to the [ASA Sonography Clinical Supervision Framework](#).¹

Background

What is sonography and its importance in healthcare?

Sonography, also known as diagnostic ultrasound, is a medical imaging technique that uses sound waves to produce images of the body's internal structures. This non-invasive diagnostic test allows sonographers to visualise organs, tissues, and blood flow in real-time.

Sonography plays an important role in achieving healthy patient outcomes by aiding in the management and monitoring of various health conditions. Sonographers work with a range of applications and specialists including cardiology, obstetrics, women's health, men's health, abdominal imaging, musculoskeletal imaging, vascular, paediatric, breast, thyroid, and other areas.

A sonographer is a specialist healthcare professional accredited to use ultrasound equipment to perform diagnostic imaging procedures. They investigate and acquire anatomical images, apply clinical reasoning, measure and interpret data, obtain real-time video loops, Doppler information, interventional guidance, and physiological and patient-specific clinical information for medical and diagnostic purposes. Sonographers work in close proximity with patients, primarily conducting clinical examinations within their scope of practice. They ensure that imaging strategies align with clinical requirements, professional guidelines, and best practice.

Trainee sonographers develop skills in modifying scanning techniques based on clinical presentations, patient history, and imaging findings. Upon completing a study, sonographers provide a report based on clinical findings and imaging outcomes to inform the referring healthcare practitioner. In Australia, this sonographer's report is typically verified by a reporting clinician. In New Zealand, accredited and endorsed sonographers can work autonomously to authorise final clinical sonography reports, often referred to as 'reporting sonographers'. A sonographer may also be part of a medical team utilising interventional procedures to diagnose disease or treat underlying pathologies.

Sonographers apply their skills across various health settings, including public and private hospitals, private clinics, independent practices, and non-radiology physician clinics in metropolitan, rural, regional, and remote settings. They may be primarily embedded in relevant departments (radiology, cardiology, obstetrics and vascular), operating independently, or in mobile roles. Service delivery may be in a clinic, hospital, community, or home-based setting.

Occupational roles for sonographers are wide and varied and can include²:

- Clinical sonographer
- Manager
- Researcher
- Tutor
- Academic
- Educator
- Clinical supervisor / tutor
- Sales / product / application specialist
- Policy officer

What constitutes a sonographer trainee?

A trainee, learner, or student sonographer is an individual enrolled in an accredited sonography program, working towards professional competency in medical sonography. Clinical training placements within a patient care environment are an essential component to the education and training of sonographers and are a core requirement of all accredited sonography courses.

In Australia, trainee sonographers undertaking clinical training in a patient environment must maintain a logbook and be registered as an Accredited Student Sonographer (ASS) with the Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR). They must be enrolled in an ASAR-accredited program and provide annual evidence of their trainee status to maintain accreditation.³

In New Zealand, trainee sonographers are registered with the Medical Radiation Technologists Board (MRTB). They must be enrolled in a Board-approved training program, provide evidence of their enrolment, and clinical training site.⁴

Legislative practicing requirements

To perform clinical ultrasound examinations eligible for a Medicare rebate in Australia, qualified sonographers must be accredited with the ASAR.⁵ In New Zealand, sonographers must be registered with the MRTB and hold a current Annual Practising Certificate.⁶

Sonographers are guided by regulations and rules within their jurisdiction. While Australia and New Zealand have similar jurisdictional regulations and guidelines, Australian sonographers must be aware of federal, state, and territory legislation and practice in accordance with the National Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers.⁷ In New Zealand, sonographers must be aware of associated acts including Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022,⁸ Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003,⁹ and the MRTB Code of Conduct and Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights.¹⁰

Sonographers must remain up to date with best practice principles, current trends, and latest techniques via Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Mandatory CPD is now seen in many industries, requiring professionals to demonstrate evidence of this commitment to sustain accreditation or registration. Sonographers must abide by the recommendation of continuous learning as set out by ASAR or the NZ MRTB over the set assessment interval, either triennially (Australia) or biennial (NZ).

What constitutes a clinical supervisor?

Sonography trainees will participate in academic studies and must also gain practical experience in a clinical environment. It is the role of a clinical supervisor, also known as a tutor, to assist in the onsite training of a trainee sonographer. Clinical supervisors may include experienced sonographers, or in some cases in Australia, a Medical Specialist. The supervisor must be competent in the examination or procedure they are supervising and operate within their own scope of practice. As training evolves, supervisors may utilise other sonographers to assist, however, it is the clinical supervisor who is ultimately responsible for the trainee in ensuring safe, appropriate, and high-quality patient care. See [ASA Sonography Clinical Supervision Framework](#) for more details.¹

Training positions

Despite the shortage of ultrasound training positions in Australia and New Zealand, maintaining high training standards remains crucial. This shortage poses significant challenges for the healthcare system, and the ASA, and its partners, are conscious of the increasing burden on skilled sonographers. Each training position holds considerable value, and the lack of immediate rewards for this investment can strain some departments.¹¹

Trainees may be required to relocate or travel significant distances to undertake a clinical training placement, which can incur financial and other costs. Clinical training placements can vary, including both paid and unpaid arrangements. In some instances, the trainee may pay to receive training. The arrangement can depend on the training model, whether it is in the public or private sector, the scope of practice, the education pathway, and the trainee's level of experience and competence. Trainees considering paying for a clinical training position should carefully evaluate the proposed total cost over the duration of their course. Access to equipment and patients does not necessarily equate to appropriate clinical training.

Clinical Supervision

Role of clinical supervisors

Supervisors play an important role in the mentoring and development of sonography trainees. Their responsibilities go beyond overseeing the trainee's work; they are instrumental in shaping the professional growth and competency of future sonographers.

Supervisors support trainees through:

1. **Guidance and mentorship:** Supervisors provide educational support by helping trainees understand complex concepts and develop practical skills. They mentor trainees allowing them to grow in confidence.
2. **Skill development:** Supervisors facilitate training in collaboration with the course provider to ensure trainees gain confidence, practice and refine their skills under expert guidance. They also provide constructive feedback helping trainees develop competency to practice. Collaborative feedback will also guide the supervisors to understand the needs of the trainee.
3. **Standards and safety:** Supervisors ensure trainees adhere to professional standards and protocols to ensure patient safety. Supervisors also promote safe and ergonomic practice for trainees.
4. **Professional development:** Supervisors encourage continuous learning and help trainees develop critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills.
5. **Emotional support:** Supervisors provide professional and emotional support to help trainees manage stress, avoid burnout, and learn skills to communicate effectively with patients and other allied health members. They foster a positive and supportive work environment to support trainee wellbeing and motivation.

Supervisors possess an advanced skillset and often possess additional qualifications and skills related to supervision. Supervisors have substantial clinical experience and ensure they stay updated with advancements in the field of medical sonography. Supervisors must be able to provide timely oversight and support for trainees. They should possess strong communication skills and leadership qualities to guide and motivate trainees as they progress in their skillset. They adhere to legal and ethical guidelines, ensure trainees comply with professional standards and promote optimal patient care.

Supervision models

There are different models of supervision and those used will depend on:

- Trainee level of experience and competence
- Learning styles and preferences
- Clinical setting and resources
- Complexity of clinical cases
- Educational objectives and goals
- Cultural and organisational factors
- Supervisory skills and training
- Feedback and evaluation mechanisms
- Trainees need for emotional support
- Geographical and logistical considerations

Image 1: Different models of supervision



The degree of supervision will depend on the competence and experience of the trainee.

Levels of supervision may include:

- A supervisor present in the ultrasound room the entire examination providing direct supervision
- Extension of examination or rescanning areas after the initial examination is performed by the trainee
- Review of ultrasound images and discussion of the case, before the patient leaves, to enable rescanning if required

Expectations of Clinical Training including Clinical Placement

What are the expectations of sonographer trainees?

The expectation is that sonography trainees will gain competence with their clinical scanning. Current Australian and New Zealand sonography accreditation standards recommend trainees within an accredited university program obtain a minimum of three days per week of clinical training across two years.^{12,13} This implies that trainees will spend a minimum of 2000 hours in clinical training. The combination of fine psychomotor skills, communication, image optimisation, clinical interpretation, and real time analysis across a variety of examination types, is a development process which requires clinical immersion.¹⁴ Depending on the speciality, trainees will demonstrate their clinical training in the form of clinical hours of scanning, which will provide evidence of the range of studies as well as the accumulation of clinical training.¹²

Sonographer trainees are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner and abide by the policies, procedures and guidelines set out by:

- The course provider the trainee is enrolled with; and
- The workplace they are employed by or undertaking placement at; and
- The overarching professional standards for sonographers
- New Zealand trainees should refer to the Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora **Clinical Student Placement and Access Agreement** for guidance on placement requirements and compliance obligations

Are there any specific pre-placement requirements for sonographer trainees?

Different clinical settings may require prerequisite training or certifications prior to commencing a placement onsite. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Record of immunisation
- CPR and first aid training
- Hand hygiene training
- Infection control training
- Working with children check
- National criminal history check
- Manual handling

What can a trainee expect from a training site?

A trainee can expect a training site to provide:

- A supportive and well-structured learning environment under the supervision of a recognised clinical supervisor.
- Prioritisation of both educational needs and patient safety.
- Compliance with safety regulations and current standards for professional practice.

Training sites are responsible for:

- Continuously improving their training environment through feedback, reflection and ongoing learning.
- Supporting trainees with supervision, appropriate examination times, and type of ultrasound examination tailored to the trainee's stage of learning, competence and confidence.

Training sites should:

- Develop and maintain workplace learning plans.
- Implement induction for trainees entering a training environment for the first time.
- Utilise a variety of teaching methods such as.
 - direct observation
 - case studies
 - scenario discussions
 - formal teaching on specific topics
- Implement structured schedules that allocate specific times for both clinical duties and learning activities.
- Ensure trainees have dedicated periods for hands-on practice, theoretical learning, and reflection.

As part of the induction process trainees are made aware of safe pathways for communication for:

- Issues that may arise in clinical training
- Issues that many require assistance from education providers

Training sites and supervisors should:

- Support trainees in their preparation for assessments.
- Ensure a supervisor is onsite to provide guidance and suitable support.

Does the trainee require indemnity insurance?

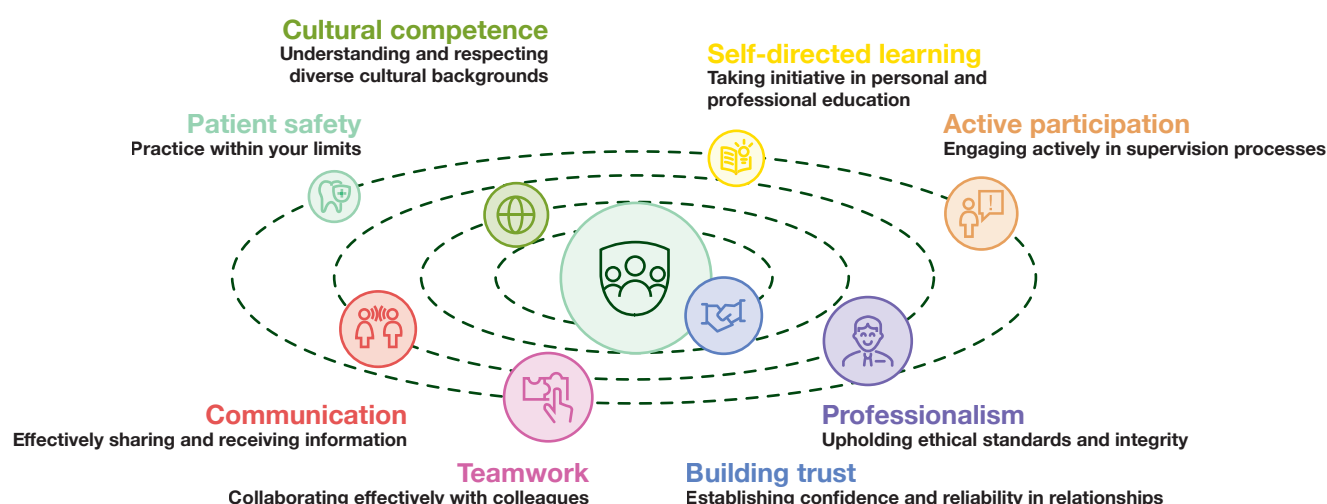
Trainees generally do not need individual indemnity insurance as they are typically covered by their educational institution or workplace. Most universities and placement providers have insurance policies that protect trainees undertaking specified placement, training, and supervised work. Employers and placement sites also usually provide liability coverage for trainees onsite. However, trainees should check with their institution or workplace to confirm the extent of their coverage before considering additional insurance.

Trainee Responsibilities

Supervision is a collaborative process that requires active participation from both the supervisor and the trainee.¹⁵ Trainees must understand their responsibilities and take an active role in the supervision process to maximise their learning outcomes.¹⁵ Trainees must exhibit clinical professionalism to successfully transition into competent clinicians.^{16,17} The following table outlines the primary responsibilities of a trainee, though it is not exhaustive.

Practice ensuring patient safety	• Recognise professional limits and practice within those limits.^{16,17} • Always request assistance when required to ensure patient safety and care remain a priority. • Advise supervisor immediately of any issues or incidents.¹⁵
Practice safe and sensitive care	• Demonstrate respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, gender diversity, and sensitive areas of practice such as mental health, reproductive health, and chronic illness by actively listening, acknowledging, and valuing the beliefs and practices of patients and colleagues.^{18,19} • Engage in ongoing education, self-reflection of own biases, understanding how they impact healthcare delivery, and strive to provide safe and sensitive care.^{18,19}
Practice self-directed learning	• Take responsibility for own learning by proactively seeking resources, asking insightful questions, and actively engaging in the learning process.¹⁵ Demonstrate initiative and a commitment to continuous improvement. • Be well-prepared for training sessions, tutorials, and meetings.²⁰⁻²²
Practice active participation	• Engage in the supervision process by contributing to discussions, sharing insights, and being open to feedback.¹⁵ • Commit to adapting practice in identified areas to achieve improvement.¹⁵ • Maintain all records and documentation relating to clinical activities.
Practice communication	• Clearly communicate training needs and expectations. • Use appropriate language to ensure information is accurately conveyed and understood.^{16,23} • Practice active listening, showing empathy and understanding, and be open to receiving and acting on feedback to improve communication skills and overall performance.¹⁶
Practice teamwork	• Collaborate effectively with colleagues by actively participating in team discussions, sharing knowledge and insights, and supporting peers to achieve common goals.¹⁶ • Maintain clear, honest, and respectful communication with team members to ensure smooth coordination and address any issues promptly.¹⁶
Practice building trust	• Maintain a professional working relationship with the supervisor to allow for open and honest discussions.²¹ • Develop and apply skills in conflict resolution to effectively address and resolve any issues that arise, fostering a collaborative and positive environment.¹⁶ • Foster a strong, trusting relationship with patients by actively listening to their concerns, demonstrating empathy, maintaining confidentiality, and consistently providing high-quality care.
Practice professionalism	• Consistently adhering to ethical guidelines and professional standards, demonstrating integrity, honesty, and respect in all interactions with patients, colleagues, and supervisors.¹⁶ • Take responsibility for actions, by being punctual, reliable, and maintaining a high level of competence and diligence in clinical duties, ensuring a positive contribution to the team.¹⁵

Image 2: Trainee responsibilities



Skill Progression

A trainee will progress through skill development from the novice stage to independent practice. A trainee may be at different stages of development for various examinations, and progression should be based on competency. The level of supervision will gradually decrease over time as skill increases. The following table outlines expectations as trainees progress:

Fundamentals		
Focus: Orientation, probe handling, basic scanning techniques, effective communication with patients and supervisors	Skills: Requires close supervision for image optimisation, identification of normal anatomy, initial pattern recognition Milestones: • Complete introductory scanning checklists • Demonstrate correct probe handling and ergonomics • Successfully acquire standard views of key structures	Characteristics: This is a challenging stage. Trainees often struggle with clinical knowledge, identifying clinical clues, and focusing on the needs of the patient while trying to master the technical aspects of scanning. At this point, their communication, positioning, and patient interaction skills are in the early stages of development and need direct supervision.

Developing core competence

Focus: Expanding anatomical knowledge, improving scanning efficiency, and recognising common pathology	Skills: Refining scanning sequences, improving hand-eye coordination, and gaining confidence in image interpretation Milestones: • Complete scans for foundational examinations • Recognise and describe normal variants and common pathologies • Begin integrating clinical reasoning into practice	Characteristics: Trainees are developing their skills, but they may still struggle with various aspects. They are learning to answer clinical questions and modify basic examinations. As their experience grows, they will become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. It is important for trainees to seek guidance from their supervisors when needed.
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Refining technique and troubleshooting

Focus: Advanced scanning techniques, complex case recognition, and improving diagnostic accuracy	Skills: Troubleshooting difficult scans, modifying protocols when needed, and enhancing speed of examination with no loss of quality Milestones: • Perform intermediate-level cases with minimal guidance • Identify subtle pathologies and confidently adjust techniques for different patient presentations • Demonstrate independent decision-making in scan approach	Characteristics: Trainees are engaging in more comprehensive examinations and enhancing their critical thinking skills. They begin to use their knowledge from previous cases and modify protocols based on the clinical question and patient's condition. As they become more efficient, they recognise subtle findings and anticipate potential issues. Trainees can empathise and communicate with the patient in a professional manner and begin to contribute effectively as a team member.
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Transition to independent practice

Focus: Full autonomy in scanning, high-level clinical decision-making, and preparation for professional certification.	Skills: Efficiently performing complex scans, confidently reporting findings. Milestones: • Independently manage a full scanning session with confidence • Identify subtle pathologies and confidently adjust techniques for different patient presentations • Demonstrate independent decision-making in scan approach	Characteristics: Trainees approach scans with developed knowledge, performing most examinations safely, efficiently, and without direct supervision. They act professionally and ethically, understand the ultrasound examination as a cohesive process rather than a series of discrete steps. A trainee's pathology and image acquisition skills are developed for all but complex or rare cases. They utilise peer supervision advice when required.
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Professionalism & Communication

Maintaining confidentiality

As allied health professionals, trainees will have access to private patient details. In both Australia and New Zealand, patient confidentiality is a legal and ethical obligation for all healthcare providers, including trainees, ensuring that personal and medical information is protected. In Australia, the Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)²⁴ and state-based health privacy laws regulate the collection, use, and disclosure of health information. In New Zealand, the Health Information Privacy Code 2020²⁵ (under the Privacy Act 2020) governs the handling of patient data. Healthcare providers in both countries must keep patient information secure and can only disclose it with consent or under specific legal circumstances, such as public health concerns or law enforcement requirements. All healthcare professionals are under an obligation to understand their duties to themselves, their patients, and their colleagues, as these obligations are bound in various legislative means and have substantial penalties if breached.

These laws relate to the use of patient images for personal use, including assignments, assessments, and professional presentations. Trainees must ensure the use of any ultrasound imagery is reproduced with expressed patient consent or are deidentified of all patient information, including:

- Name
- DOB
- UR or ID numbers
- Worksite identifying information

Reporting scan findings

Trainee sonographers are expected to develop skills necessary to produce accurate and detailed reports of ultrasound findings, ensuring clear and concise communication using appropriate medical terminology. These reports should be reviewed by the supervisor before being sent for final reporting and clinical decision-making. If a trainee is uncertain at any point during their skills progression, even if deemed competent and independent, they must bring in a senior sonographer, or follow department protocol, prior to the patient leaving the ultrasound room.

Trainees should actively seek feedback to improve their reporting skills. Reports should follow workplace guidelines and protocols to ensure consistency and should be completed and submitted in a timely manner to facilitate prompt clinical decision-making.

Communicating findings with patients

Trainee sonographers are expected to communicate ultrasound findings clearly, empathetically, and professionally, within their scope of practice, and under the supervision of a qualified sonographer, while following workplace guidelines. Explanations must be easy for patients to understand, ensuring that the information provided is accurate and appropriate. Trainees should address patients' questions or concerns and refer to other healthcare providers when required. Trainees should tailor their communication approach to meet the needs of diverse patient populations, respecting cultural beliefs and using interpreters when necessary to ensure clear communication.

Delivering unexpected news & debriefing

Within the sonography role, discovering unexpected or distressing findings is a challenging and emotionally charged experience, particularly for trainees who are still developing their communication skills and professional resilience. Delivering unexpected news can lead to stress, anxiety, or even self-doubt.²⁶ In these situations, the trainee should follow workplace protocols, established resources, and the guidance of their clinical supervisor regarding the management of these findings and the extent of communication with the patient.

After encountering such circumstances, it is recommended that the trainee undertake some form of debriefing with their clinical supervisor, or responsible delegate. Debriefing is not just beneficial; it is essential for the trainee's emotional wellbeing, professional growth, and overall competence in patient care. See [debriefing and self-reflection](#) for further information.

Self-Reflection, Feedback and Assessments

Debriefing and self-reflection

Trainee sonographers are expected to engage in regular debriefing and self-reflection as part of their professional development. Debriefing with experienced professionals allows trainees to process their emotions in a structured and supportive manner. Debriefing involves discussing and analysing experiences with supervisors or peers to gain insights and improve future performance. This process helps trainees process their emotions, understand their actions, and learn from both successes and mistakes.²⁷ Without an opportunity to reflect, trainees may internalise negative experiences, leading to burnout or decreased confidence in their communication abilities. Through debriefing, trainees can acknowledge their feelings, seek support from mentors or peers, and develop emotional resilience, which are essential qualities for a successful career in healthcare. During debriefing sessions trainees should be open and honest about their experiences and be receptive to feedback. Trainees should help identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to address any challenges encountered during clinical practice.

Self-reflection involves trainees reviewing their performance, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals for improvement.²⁸ This practice helps to gain deeper insights, improve clinical practice, and show professional accountability.²⁰⁻²² Self-reflection allows trainees to continually evaluate and improve clinical skills to align with evidence-based best practices.^{16,23} Trainees can document this process through a reflective journal.

Receiving feedback

Trainees should regularly have structured feedback sessions to help them understand their progress and areas for improvement.^{21,29} These sessions should include both formal evaluations and informal check-ins.^{2,30} Trainees should be open and receptive to feedback, listening and considering it thoughtfully. Trainees should make a concerted effort to implement feedback by making necessary changes to their practice.

Trainees should:

- Actively seek and discuss feedback with their supervisor to effectively incorporate it into practice.¹⁵
- Constructively receive and engage with feedback to develop feedback literacy.
- Discuss and agree with their supervisor on the preferred feedback style, including format, frequency, and delivery method.¹⁵

Assignments and assessments

During clinical placement, trainees are expected to complete assignments and scan assessments as directed by their course provider. Clinical training positions may also develop their own skills assessments separate to course providers. Assessments should be coordinated between the trainee and clinical supervisors, and completed within the specific deadlines set by the course provider. Trainees should thoroughly prepare for assessments, including practical examinations, and are responsible for maintaining a logbook, which should be regularly reviewed by their supervisor.

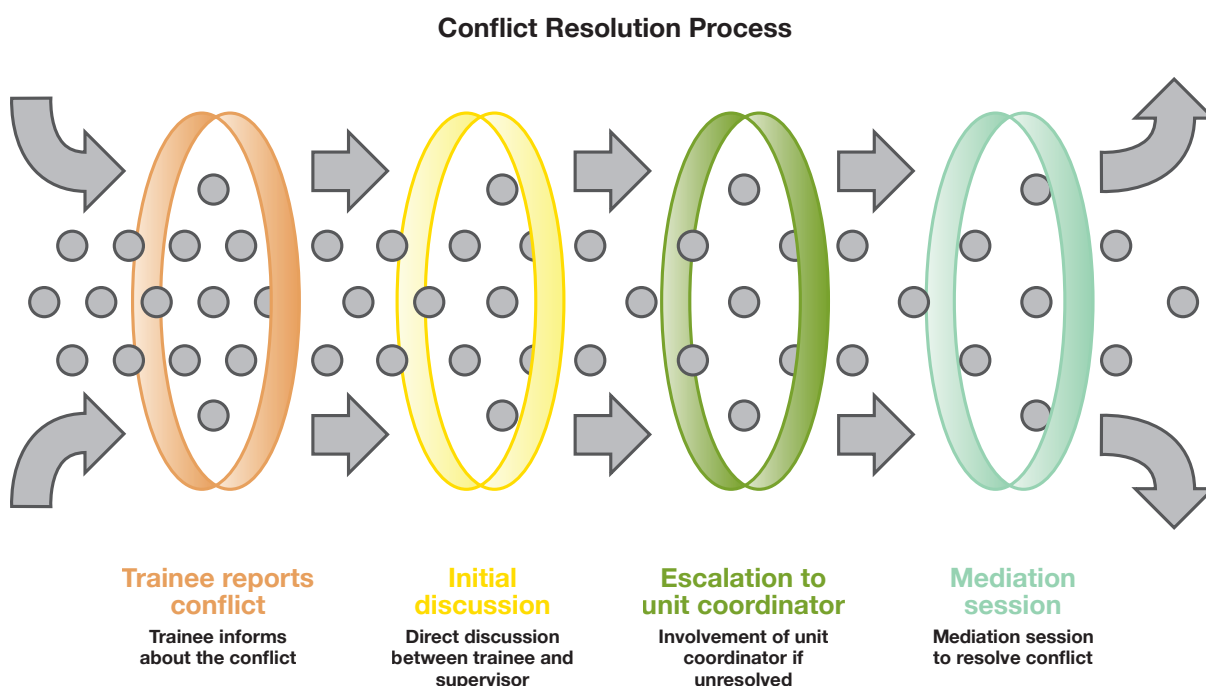
Situation Management & Escalating Concerns

Managing workplace conflicts

Trainees should learn to recognise workplace conflicts, such as miscommunication, and seek guidance from their supervisors or mentors to ensure that conflicts are managed in a timely manner, and according to workplace policy. Trainees should express their concerns clearly and respectfully, listening to the perspectives of others involved. The trainee should escalate concerns to the appropriate supervisor, manager, or human resources delegate and be guided by their expertise in conflict resolution. In this manner, the trainee is encouraged to participate in the process and gain experience in conflict resolution, active listening, and problem solving.

In the event of a conflict between a trainee and their clinical supervisor, seeking assistance from the course provider can be a valuable step towards resolution. The unit coordinator or discipline lead can offer an impartial perspective and facilitate communication between the parties involved. They can help identify the root cause of the conflict, mediate discussions, and propose solutions that are fair and acceptable to both the trainee and the supervisor. This approach ensures that the learning environment remains supportive and conducive to the trainee's professional development. The unit coordinator can also provide guidance on institutional policies and procedures, ensuring that the resolution process aligns with the educational institution's standards and expectations.

Image 3: Possible pathway for conflict resolution between trainee and supervisor



Resources and Support

Trainees can find additional support through professional membership associations, such as the ASA. These associations offer resources, including educational materials, professional guidance, and opportunities for continuous professional development. Trainees can benefit from a variety of programs and services, such as access to training modules, networking events, and conferences. The ASA also offers opportunities for volunteering, mentoring, and peer support, which encourages trainees to stay updated with the latest industry standards, enhance professional growth and career trajectory.

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