



Volunteer Wellbeing and Burnout By-Law

Griffith University Medicine Society Incorporated

This policy has been accepted by a vote of members at an Executive Committee Meeting on 8th February 2020

Preamble

Griffith University Medicine Society (GUMS) is the peak representative body for Griffith University medical students. It is a student society that strives to enrich all aspects of the lives of postgraduates involved in the study of the science of medicine.

This is an internal governance document, which outlines the approach GUMS takes to preventing and addressing volunteer burnout. GUMS recognises the importance of volunteers balancing their medical studies alongside their personal lives and understands that volunteers may, at times, feel overwhelmed by additional GUMS related activities. This by-law consequently aims to mitigate and address these issues where appropriate and consequently promote volunteer satisfaction and wellbeing alongside their participation in GUMS activities. This By-Law is accepted as a by-law under the GUMS Constitution. Where there is perceived inconsistency with the GUMS Constitution, the Constitution will be held as the guiding document. The GUMS Executive has the right to interpret and apply this By-Law.

Definitions

In this document, the following definitions are to be used:

Executive refers to the group of individuals who are elected annually to the GUMS Executive Committee. This group carries the full responsibilities and powers as outlined in this document.

Management Committee refers to the group of individuals who form the GUMS Management Committee, who are either elected or appointed annually. This further includes portfolio officers, representatives, conveners and coordinators.

Subcommittee refers to a group of individuals reporting to Management Committee or Executive members for the purpose of enacting specific GUMS duties.

Volunteer refers to any person who is involved in organising activities, events or media that are associated with the Griffith University Medicine Society Incorporated. This includes the Executive Committee, Management Committee and Subcommittee Members.

Burnout is defined as emotional, mental or physical exhaustion due to prolonged stress.

Background

All GUMS volunteers undertake their roles on a voluntary basis in addition to their university studies and other personal commitments. GUMS recognises that other commitments may impact a volunteer's ability to effectively perform their role and, vice versa, GUMS activities may have an impact on a volunteer's other commitments. GUMS places a strong emphasis on promoting the wellbeing and safety of all volunteers, encouraging them to maintain a balance between their commitments. This by-law outlines strategies that GUMS will employ to, chiefly, prevent burnout, but also to recognise signs of volunteer burnout and provide strategies to volunteers who may be underperforming in their role due to burnout or other circumstances.



Prevention of Burnout in GUMS Volunteers

In order to prevent burnout of volunteers, GUMS aims to fostering an open, friendly and supportive GUMS culture between members of the Executive, Management committee and Subcommittees. This is paramount in ensuring that GUMS volunteers are comfortable in asking for help when necessary. Specifically, this is achieved by three key methods detailed below.

1. Creating Accessible Resources

Volunteers are to be informed of resources stored on the GUMS Google Drive and GUMS website that aim to aid in the prevention, and self-management, of stress. These resources also direct volunteers to the appropriate executive members to receive help from. Specifically, the “GUMS Volunteer Wellbeing Pack”. This pack includes accessible resources for burnout prevention as well as the GUMS internal escalation pathway for volunteers facing burnout.

2. Blackout Periods

Volunteers may elect to take a 'blackout' period from GUMS at any time. During this period the volunteer will not be required to undertake any GUMS related tasks. A blackout is designed to prevent burnout by relieving GUMS volunteers from GUMS related activities and duties at times when they are busy or otherwise unavailable, while ensuring that GUMS related events and activities continue to function. Blackouts may be taken for:

- Non-urgent or planned periods (including, but not limited to, upcoming exams, holidays/trips and expected busy periods)
- Urgent or unplanned periods.

To take a blackout, a volunteer must discuss the blackout period with the Executive member overseeing them. A volunteer should provide at least 14 days' notice to the Executive about the blackout period for non-urgent or pre-planned reasons. GUMS understands that urgent situations may arise that make this timeline unreasonable. In these instances, a volunteer should promptly communicate their circumstances with the overseeing Executive member to discuss taking a blackout period.

Discussion with the overseeing Executive member should include discussion of:

- The circumstances surrounding the blackout
- The duration of the blackout
- How the volunteer will prepare for the blackout to ensure that the blackout period does not adversely impact other GUMS volunteers or GUMS affiliated activities or events.
- Other volunteers that will be responsible for the duties of the volunteer during the blackout period
- How other volunteers and external persons will be informed of the Blackout. This may include communicating with other volunteers via Slack, enabling out-of-office email auto-replies and email forwarding.

If the executive believes that a volunteer is making requests for blackout periods of unreasonable durations, or an unreasonable number of blackout periods, the volunteer may be managed as an *Underperforming* Volunteer, as discussed in this by-law.

3. Professional Development Plans

GUMS encourages each volunteer to create a Professional Development Plan (PDP) with their overseeing member of the Executive. The aim of a PDP is to allow for clear goal setting and the creation of actionable steps, allowing for more achievable goals. A PDP will also detail personal signs and indicators of stress and burnout, and individualised tools for self-management of burnout. A template of the PDP can be found on the GUMS Google Drive and GUMS Website.

It is recommended that the relevant executive member meets with the volunteer every 2 to 4 months, or as required to review, update or revisit goals and progress.



Identifying Burnout in Volunteers

GUMS recognises that despite preventative measures, burnout is still a real possibility for GUMS volunteers. For this reason, all GUMS executive are educated on the signs of burnout and encouraged to regularly check in with the GUMS volunteers who they oversee. This enables early detection of signs of burnout and consequently enables early intervention.

Although the signs of burnout are variable, in the context of being a GUMS volunteer, burnout may present as a volunteer appearing to underperform in their role. This is defined as a volunteer who fails to perform the tasks expected for their role to a level appropriate to their role. This may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Failing to attend meetings
- Failing to respond to emails, messages or Slack communication within an appropriate timeframe
- Failing to meet deadlines
- Failing to appropriately oversee volunteers
- Participating in in team discussions, decision making and problem solving
- Failing to appropriately report to the senior volunteer overseeing the person
- Failing to complete any other tasks, of which the volunteer has been advised, that are relevant to the volunteer's role.

If a volunteer is identified as underperforming:

- Concerns about underperforming volunteers should be brought to the attention of the Executive.
- Concerns about an underperforming member of the Executive should be brought to the attention of the President or another member of the Executive.

The relevant Executive member will investigate to determine if the volunteer is underperforming. If a volunteer is identified as underperforming, the below framework should be followed.



Framework for Assisting and Managing Underperforming Volunteers

An underperforming volunteer can be assisted in three stages outlined below.

Stage 1: Initial Meeting

An initial meeting between the relevant member of the Executive and the volunteer is conducted in order to provide appropriate assistance and support to the volunteer. During this meeting:

1. The Executive member should assure the volunteer that any sensitive details of the meeting will remain confidential between The GUMS Executive and the volunteer where appropriate.
2. The Executive member should inform the volunteer of the reasons they have been deemed an underperforming volunteer.
3. The Executive member should create a safe space for the volunteer to respond and share their experience in the role as well as raise any concerns.
4. The Executive member should ask the volunteer:
 - a. About their progress in their studies;
 - b. If any personal circumstances are affecting their capacity to perform;
 - c. If there has been conflict within the GUMS team that has led to decreased performance.
5. The Executive member should ask the volunteer:
 - a. How much time they currently spend undertaking the role;
 - b. Their personal understanding of the duties of the role;
 - c. If they are enjoying the role and would like to continue in the role.
6. The Executive member should review the volunteer's PDP if one has been made.
7. The Executive member must:
 - a. Appropriately address any university related or personal concerns raised by the volunteer by referring the volunteer to the relevant support services or resources.
 - i. This may involve encouraging the volunteer to undertake a blackout period as detailed above in "**Prevention of Burnout in GUMS Volunteers.**"
 - b. Inform the President or another member of the Executive of any GUMS related conflict that has affected volunteer performance. This will be managed as per the GUMS Code of Conduct.
 - c. Provide the volunteer with a clear description of the role they are required to perform.
 - d. Create a specific and achievable action plan for the coming weeks.
 - i. This may take the form of a PDP (mentioned above in "**Prevention of Burnout in GUMS Volunteers**")
 - e. Set a date for a follow-up meeting no more than 14 days from the date of the initial meeting.
 - f. Be available to the volunteer between the date of the initial meeting and the follow-up meeting as to provide guidance as required.
 - g. Document the details of the initial meeting.
8. The volunteer and the relevant Executive member may then decide that the volunteer will:
 - a. Create an action plan outlining how they will move forwards;
 - b. Undertake a blackout period;
 - c. Alter the duties that they undertake in their role;
 - d. Respond in another appropriate way.
9. If the volunteer is resistant to change, defensive or uncooperative despite the Executive member's best efforts, the Executive member may escalate their concern to the President who will then take over the management of the underperforming volunteer.
 - a. If the volunteer remains uncooperative, they may be removed from their role;
 - i. As per the constitution (Section 7.4b) if the volunteer is a member of the Executive;
 - ii. As per this by-law, if the volunteer is not a member of the Executive.



Stage 2: Follow-up meeting

1. In the follow-up meeting, the Executive member will review the performance of the volunteer in accordance with the action plan created in the initial meeting.
 - a. In this meeting the Executive member should:
 - i. Ask the volunteer if the support provided to them has been sufficient and, if not, how they may have been better supported;
 - ii. Reassess the points outlined in the **Initial Meeting** (1d and 1e);
 - iii. Provide the volunteer with a safe space to voice their concerns;
 - iv. Review the specific action plan items created in the initial meeting.
 - b. At the follow-up meeting, if the Executive member determines:
 - i. That the volunteer is performing at a level expected by GUMS, they will continue to provide ongoing support and contact the volunteer again (in person or online), within 14 days of the follow-up meeting to ensure the volunteer is still supported and still capable of continuing to perform to a satisfactory standard.
 - ii. That the volunteer is underperforming, they will conduct an appropriate discussion outlining specific steps to improving performance within the next 21 days.
 1. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the volunteer, the Executive member may refer the issue to the President who will weigh up the circumstances and may:
 - a. Arrange for appropriate help for the volunteer or;
 - b. Provide a formal warning to the volunteer or;
 - c. Arrange for the temporary or permanent replacement of the volunteer in extenuating circumstances.

Stage 3: Maintaining Wellbeing

1. After managing underperformance, it is important to maintain the volunteer's wellbeing by providing them with useful tools.
2. If the relevant Executive member and the volunteer have not already created a PDP, this must occur. If a PDP already exists, it must be reviewed.
3. The relevant Executive member should check in with the volunteer regularly, at a time period agreed upon by the volunteer and the Executive member.
4. The volunteer must be referred to the "GUMS Volunteer Wellbeing Pack" and encouraged to refer to it as appropriate.