Raising Concerns in Healthcare, Why it Matters & How to Do it Right

Following The HCPC 2024 Guidance

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Learning objectives

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1 **Understanding the HCPC Standards**

2 **Why speaking up & raising concerns in practise is important**

3 **HCPC standards & guidance related to raising concerns**

4 **Barriers to raising concerns and appropiate strategies**

5 **Responding appropriately to different situations**

Purpose

- For all HCPC registrants, raising concerns about patient safety, unprofessional behaviour, or poor practice is an essential responsibility. Speaking up promptly not only protects service users but also upholds professional standards.

- Health and care professionals are expected to act with openness and honesty when something goes wrong during patient care. This ethical responsibility, often referred to as the duty of candour, requires professionals to be open with service users, families and employers.

- This session will explore why raising concerns matters, highlighting **Standard 7 of the HCPC's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics 2024.**

- Gaining insight into constructive ways to raise concerns and how to adapt approaches based on context and role.

The HCPC 2024 **Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics** outline the responsibility to

"Report Concerns About Safety" Standard 7

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Who Are The HCPC?
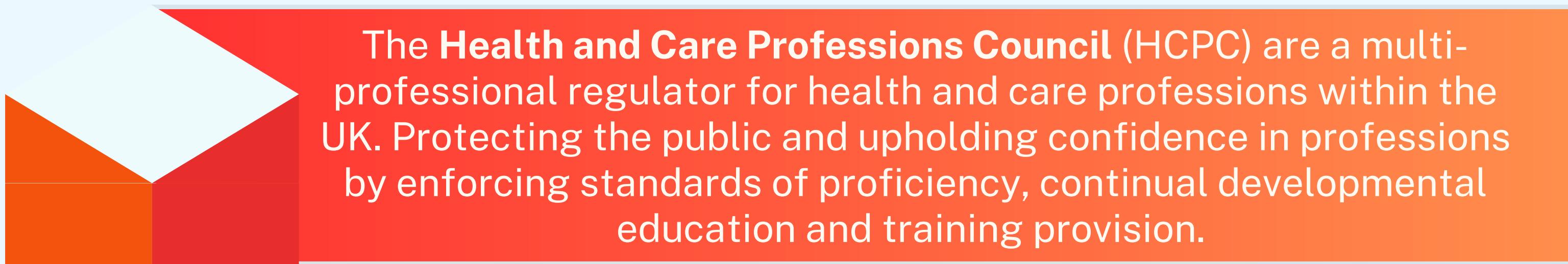
The **Health and Care Professions Council** (HCPC) are a multi-professional regulator for health and care professions within the UK. Protecting the public and upholding confidence in professions by enforcing standards of proficiency, continual developmental education and training provision.

They protect the public and support safe working environments by ensuring registrants meet professional standards and taking action when they do not.
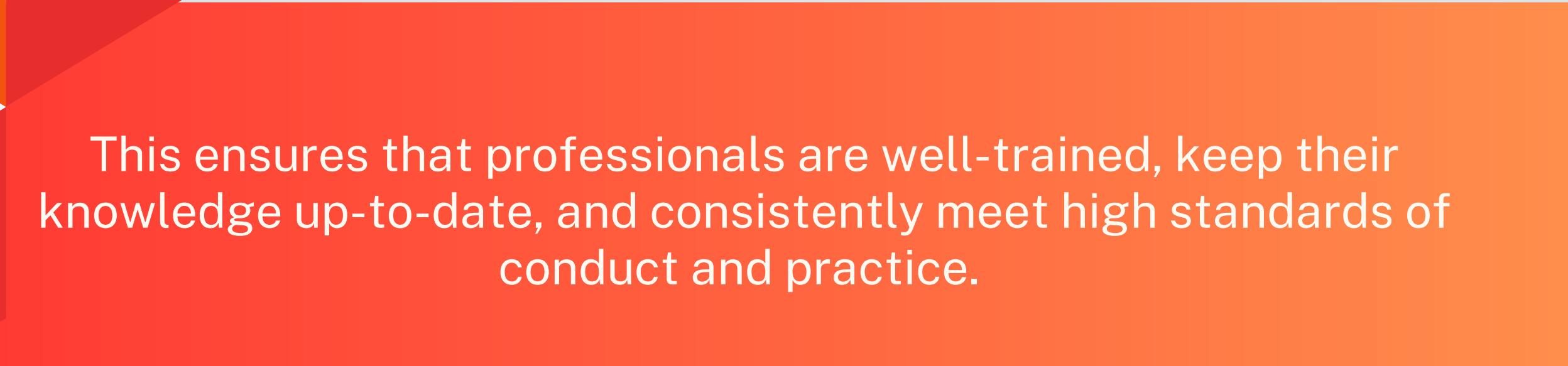
This ensures that professionals are well-trained, keep their knowledge up-to-date, and consistently meet high standards of conduct and practice.

What words come to mind when you hear "raising concerns in healthcare?"

Leadership
HCPC
Honesty
Justice
Assertiveness
Conscience
Accountability
Duty
Fear
Safety
Ethics
Escalation
WHISTLEBLOWING
INTEGRITY
Advocacy
Courage
Conflict
STANDARDS
Responsibility
REPORTING
REFLECTION
Speaking up
Communication
Vulnerability
Professionalism
Barriers
Transparency

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When is raising concerns required ?

HCPC Standards to Follow when Reporting Concerns

To report any concerns about the safety or well-being of service users promptly and appropriately.

To support and encourage others to report concerns and not prevent anyone from raising concerns.

To take appropriate action if you have concerns about the safety or wellbeing of children or vulnerable adults.

To ensure that the safety and wellbeing of service users always comes before any professional or other loyalties.

Raise concerns about bullying, harassment, or intimidation of service users, carers, or colleagues, following workplace procedures and ensuring everyone's safety

7.1   **7.2**   **7.3**   **7.4**   **7.5**

https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

When is raising concerns required ?

Follow Up Concerns

To acknowledge and act on concerns raised to you, investigating, escalating or dealing with those concerns where appropriate for you to do so.
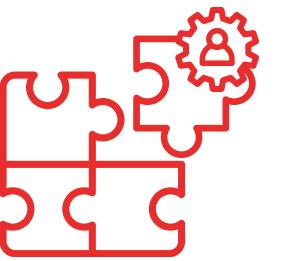
To follow up concerns you have reported and, if necessary, escalate them.

7.6

7.7

Standards of conduct, performance and ethics

These standards are effective from 1 September 2024.

+ 1. Promote and protect the interests of service users and carers

+ 2. Communicate appropriately and effectively

+ 3. Work within the limits of your knowledge and skills

+ 4. Delegate appropriately

+ 5. Respect confidentiality

+ 6. Manage risk

+ 7. Report concerns about safety

+ 8. Be open when things go wrong

+ 9. Be honest and trustworthy

+ 10. Keep records of your work

Barriers to Raising Concerns

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Unsupportive Culture

Raising issues may be seen as disloyal or disruptive. This can leave individuals feeling isolated or unsupported. The HCPC recommends fostering positive team relationships and encouraging open dialogue with supervisors

Practical Barriers

High workloads, time pressure, or not knowing the right reporting channels can delay or prevent staff from speaking up.

Fear of Consequences

Staff sometimes worry that speaking up could damage their career, create conflict with managers, or even lead to regulatory action

Doubt and Lack of Confidence

Students and newly qualified staff, who may feel their lack of experience makes their judgment less valid than that of senior colleagues may think their concern is "too small" or that they don't have enough evidence.

RELATED STANDARDS

STANDARDS THAT REQUIRE REGISTRANTS TO BE OPEN AND HONEST AND DEAL WITH CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS APROPIATELYA ND PROFESSIONALLY (HCPC, 2022)

— 8. Be open when things go wrong

**Openness with service users and carers**

— 9. Be honest and trustworthy

Personal and professional behaviour

9.1 You must make sure that your conduct justifies the public's trust and confidence in you and your profession.

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UNSUPPORTIVE CULTURE
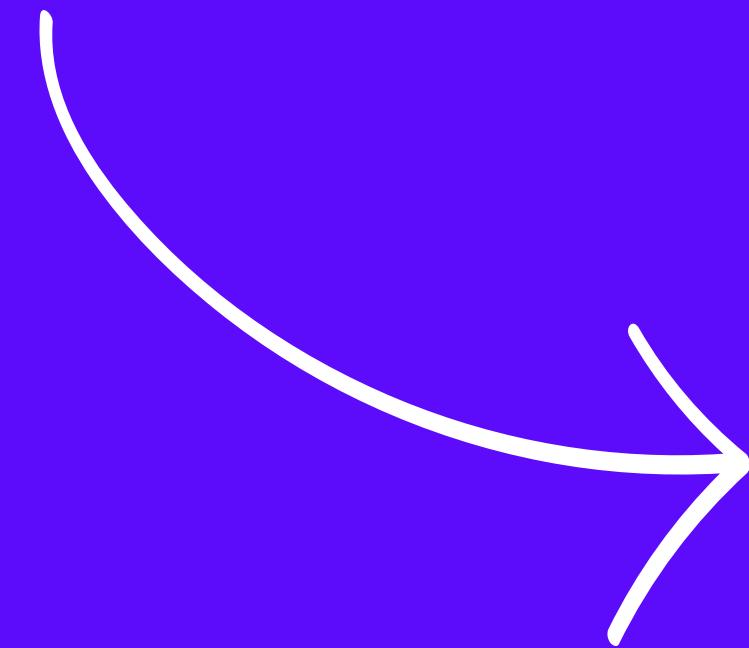
TIP

FOSTERING POSITIVE TEAM RELATIONSHIPS AND ENCOURAGING OPEN DIALOGUE WITH SUPERVISORS IS IMPORTANT. IF YOU DO NOT FEEL SAFE RAISING CONCERNS LOCALLY, YOU CAN ESCALATE TO SENIOR MANAGERS, HR, OR EXTERNAL BODIES SUCH AS THE HCPC

FAILING TO BE OPEN ABOUT MISTAKES PREVENTS LEARNING AND CAN PUT OTHERS AT RISK. BEING HONEST HELPS RESOLVE ISSUES QUICKLY AND PROVIDES SUPPORT. INVESTIGATIONS AIM TO IDENTIFY CAUSES, NOT ASSIGN BLAME, AND OPENNESS IS CRUCIAL FOR LEARNING AND PREVENTING FUTURE RISKS (HCPC, 2020)

FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES
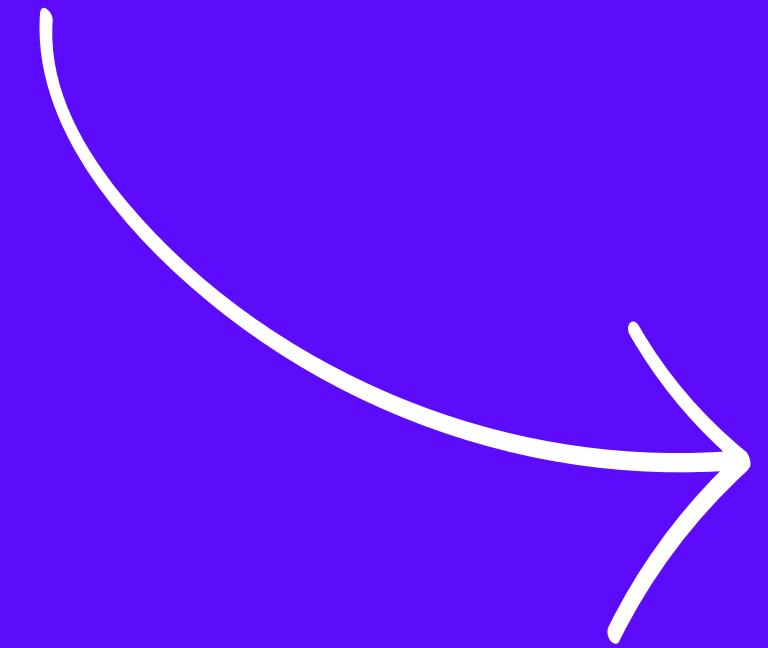
THE HCPC REMINDS US THAT RAISING CONCERNS IS NOT ONLY SUPPORTED, IT IS A PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY UNDER STANDARD 7. TAKING ACTION PROTECTS PATIENTS AND ULTIMATELY PROTECTS YOUR PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY (HCPC, 2024)

MAINTAINING HONESTY AND INTEGRITY HELPS PRESERVE PUBLIC TRUST, AND PROFESSIONALS ARE EXPECTED TO UPHOLD THE STANDARDS OF CONDUCT, PERFORMANCE, AND ETHICS WHILE ADAPTING TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES (HCPC, 2020)

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DOUBT AND LACK OF CONFIDENCE
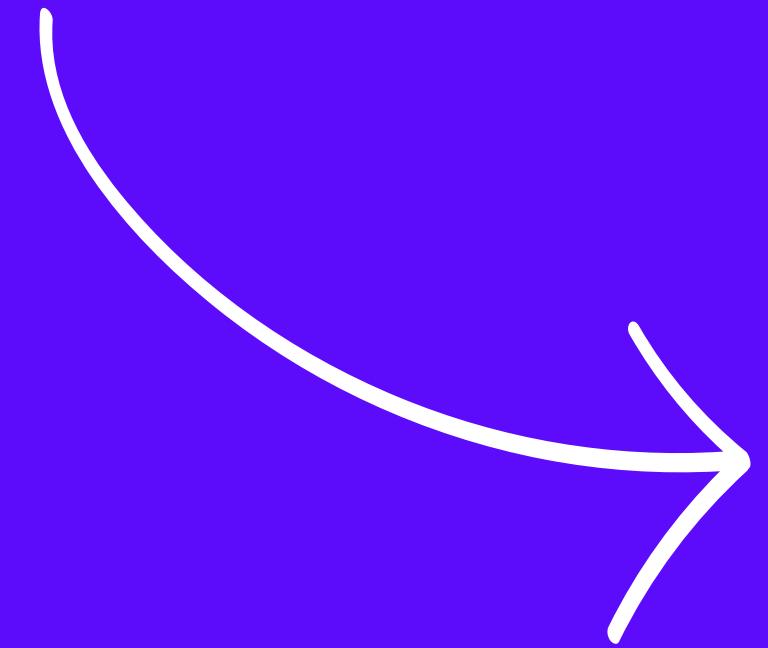
PROFESSIONALS SHOULD REPORT ERRORS APPROPRIATELY, COMMUNICATE CLEARLY WITH SERVICE USERS, EXPLAIN THE SITUATION, AND APOLOGISE SINCERELY WITHOUT IMPLYING LIABILITY. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT WITH CHILDREN, VULNERABLE ADULTS, OR THEIR CARERS (HCPC, 2020).

TIP

IF SOMETHING SEEMS UNSAFE, IT IS ALWAYS SAFER TO RAISE IT. THE HCPC HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING LEARNERS TO RECOGNIZE SITUATIONS WHERE SERVICE USERS MAY BE AT RISK AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO RAISE CONCERNS WITHOUT FEAR OF RETALIATION (HCPC, 2017).

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PRACTICAL BARRIERS
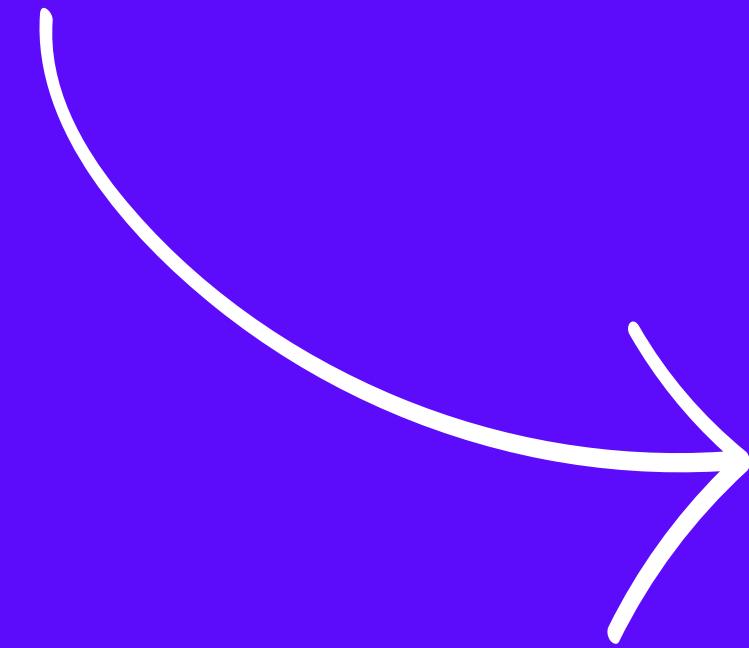
TIP

THE HCPC ENCOURAGES REGISTRANTS TO FAMILIARISE THEMSELVES WITH LOCAL POLICIES AND REMEMBER THAT PATIENT SAFETY SHOULD TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER COMPETING DEMANDS.

FAMILIARISING YOURSELF WITH LOCAL POLICIES HELPS YOU ACT OPENLY AND PROMPTLY IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG, SUPPORTING THE HCPC'S DUTY OF CANDOUR TO PRIORITISE SAFETY, APOLOGISE, INFORM, AND TAKE CORRECTIVE ACTION (HCPC, 2024)

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Importance of Raising Concerns

Protecting Service Users

Ensures patient safety by preventing harm from unsafe practice and environments.

Meeting Legal and Ethical Obligations

Ensures compliance with professional standards and potentially legal duties under whistleblowing laws (e.g. **Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998**)

Upholding Professional Integrity

Ethical responsibility to adhere to to the HCPC standards. Reflects personal accountability and professional courage.

Supporting Colleagues

By raising concerns, professionals may protect others from burnout or unsafe working conditions. Encourages a team culture of openness and safety.

Encouraging Reflective Practice

Creating the space to reflect on individual practice. Taking time to reflect can help to identify what went wrong and why, and what steps can be taken to prevent the issues from happening again

Improving Workplace Culture

Helps identify and challenge systemic issues like bullying or poor leadership and Supports a transparent, learning focused environment.

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This supports the HCPC standards and duty of candour, reinforcing ethical, professional, and safe practice

Risks of Not Raising Concerns
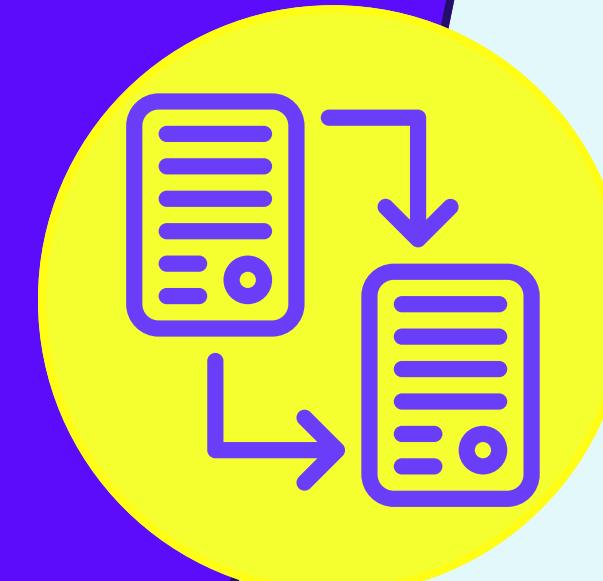
Breach of Professional Standards

Failing to act violates **HCPC Standard 7,** which requires the prompt reporting of safety concerns — putting your registration and fitness to practise at risk.

Harm to Service Users

Failing to report unsafe or unethical practice may directly lead to patient harm or deterioration in care quality.

Undermining Speaking Up

HCPC states: "**7.2 You must support and encourage others to report concerns and not prevent anyone from raising concerns**." Discouraging others, even passively, breaches this duty and may contribute to systemic risk.

Complicity in Unsafe Practice

By remaining silent, you may appear to condone poor practice or misconduct, weakening your professional integrity and legal protection.

Legal and Reputational Consequences

If an issue escalates (e.g. patient death, serious complaint), failure to act may result in disciplinary action, legal liability, and hospital reputational damage.

Domino Effect of Silence

As a student, thinking something doesn't concern you can lead to a domino effect of silence, where no one speaks up and in the end, this can harm both patients and colleagues.

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Information for students and educators

**Guidance
on conduct
and ethics
for students**

15

(HCPC, 2024)

7. Report concerns about safety

– If you are worried about the safety or wellbeing of service users, carers or others, you should speak to an appropriate member of staff at your education provider or practice placement provider promptly.

– You should inform an appropriate member of staff at your education provider or practice placement provider if you witness bullying, harassment or intimidation of a service user, carer, a learner or a member of staff at your education provider or practice placement provider.

– You should put the safety and wellbeing of service users before any personal concerns, for example about assessments, marks, other work related to your programme, employment prospects or other personal gain.

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Share the big long-term goal and impact that the content plan strives to achieve in the future.

https://www.hcpc-uk.org/students/learning-materials-for-students/case-study/student-case-study---being-open-when-things-go-wrong/

Webinar: reporting
concerns about safety

#myHCPCstandards webinars: standard 7
- reporting concerns about safety

September 2022

The standards also apply to you if you are a learner on a HCPC-approved programme

Scenario

Andrea, a student nurse, notices her mentor regularly speaking harshly to a junior colleague during shift handovers. On multiple occasions, Andrea witnesses her mentor raising their voice, making belittling remarks, and once even lightly pushing the colleague aside during a discussion. The behaviour becomes increasingly personal and aggressive, leaving the colleague visibly distressed — and making Andrea feel deeply uncomfortable and anxious during placement.

What should Andrea do ?
Pause and discuss
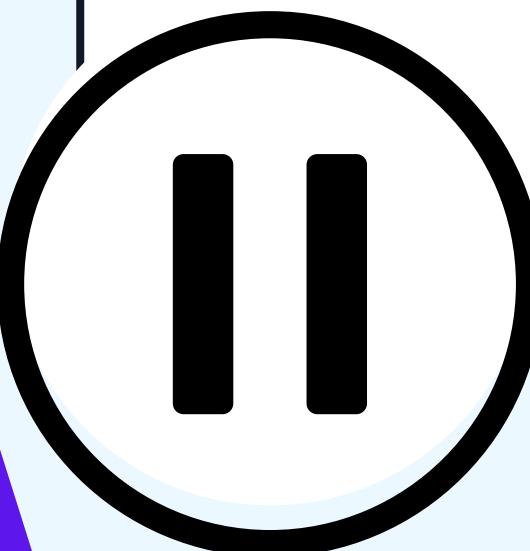
Scenario follow-up

Andrea is worried that raising concerns about her mentor's behaviour might be seen as an overreaction or cause tension during placement. However, she remembered the **HCPC 2024 Standards of conduct, performance and ethics,** which states to identify and minimise risks **[6.1]** and to report concerns regarding the act of witnessing bullying or intimidation **[7.5] and the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for students**

Andrea decides to report her concern to the placement coordinator, focusing on how the mentor's repeated behaviour was affecting a colleague's well-being. Andrea feels uncomfortable raising the issue, but is confident that doing so is necessary to protect a safe and respectful working environment. Seek support from her university link tutor / academic assessor (alternative escalation route)

Standards of conduct, performance and ethics

These standards are effective from 1 September 2024.

— 6. Manage risk

Identify and minimise risk

6.1 You must take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of harm to service users, carers and colleagues, as far as possible.

— 7. Report concerns about safety

Report concerns

7.5 You must raise concerns regarding colleagues if you witness bullying, harassment or intimidation of a service user, carer or another colleague. This should be done following the relevant procedures within your practice or organisation and maintaining the safety of all involved.

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Guidance on conduct and ethics for students

7. Report concerns about safety

– If you are worried about the safety or wellbeing of service users, carers or others, you should speak to an appropriate member of staff at your education provider or practice placement provider promptly.

– You should inform an appropriate member of staff at your education provider or practice placement provider if you witness bullying, harassment or intimidation of a service user, carer, a learner or a member of staff at your education provider or practice placement provider.

Scenario

Ella is a second-year student nurse on placement in a community nursing team. She accompanies her practice supervisor on a home visit to Mr. Lewis, a 72-year-old stroke survivor with reduced mobility and communication difficulties.

During the visit, Ella notices several concerning signs. There is little food in the kitchen, and Mr. Lewis appears underweight. He also has unexplained bruises on his arms, which he vaguely attributes to "bumping into things." In addition, a younger relative who lives with him seems uneasy about the nurses' presence and tries to hurry the visit along.

Scenario Follow up

Ella recalls HCPC **Standard 7.3, which requires registrants (and students in training) to take appropriate action if they have concerns about the safety or well-being of children or vulnerable adults.**

Instead of dismissing her concerns, Ella shares her observations immediately with her practice supervisor, recognising her responsibility as a student to escalate safeguarding concerns appropriately. She carefully writes down what she saw and heard factually, avoiding assumptions, so her supervisor has clear information to act on.

Ella then follows the safeguarding discussion with her supervisor, observing how the concern is raised according to the employer's safeguarding policy. Afterwards, she reflects on the experience, identifying that while she was able to recognise the signs of possible neglect and abuse

Scenario

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Jamal, a student radiographer, notices that one of the senior staff members regularly skips important safety checks before conducting imaging procedures. On one occasion, Jamal observes that the incorrect radiation dose is nearly selected for a patient, which could have caused unnecessary exposure. The error is corrected at the last moment, but Jamal feels deeply uneasy about the repeated lapses.
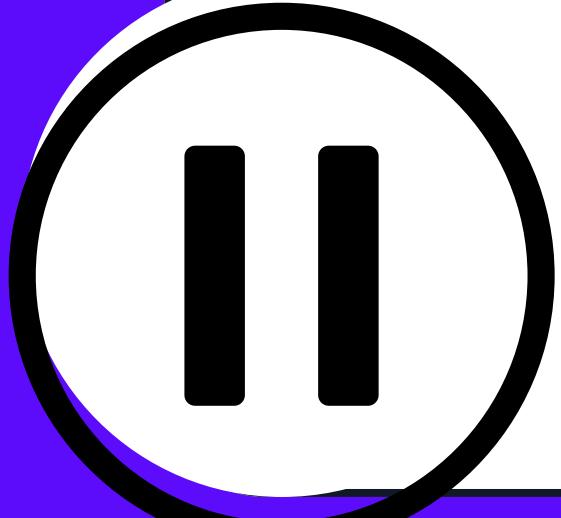
**What should Jamal do ?
Pause and discuss**

Scenario follow-up

Jamal recalls the HCPC Standard 7.1: "**You must report any concerns about the safety or well-being of service users promptly and appropriately.**" He decides to speak to the clinical lead in the department, explaining that his concern is about risk to patient safety rather than a personal criticism. As an additional step, Jamal documents his observations through the organisation's incident reporting system, ensuring the issue is formally recorded. Although he feels nervous about challenging a senior colleague, he recognises that protecting service users must come before professional loyalties **(7.4).**

Scenario

Dua, a student physiotherapist, overhears a fellow student quietly expressing worry that a member of staff is pressuring patients to continue exercises despite clear signs of pain and distress. The student feels unsure whether to say anything, fearing it might affect their assessment.
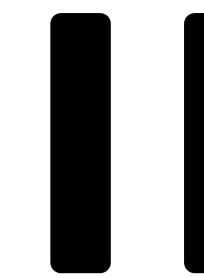
What should Dua do ?
Pause and discuss
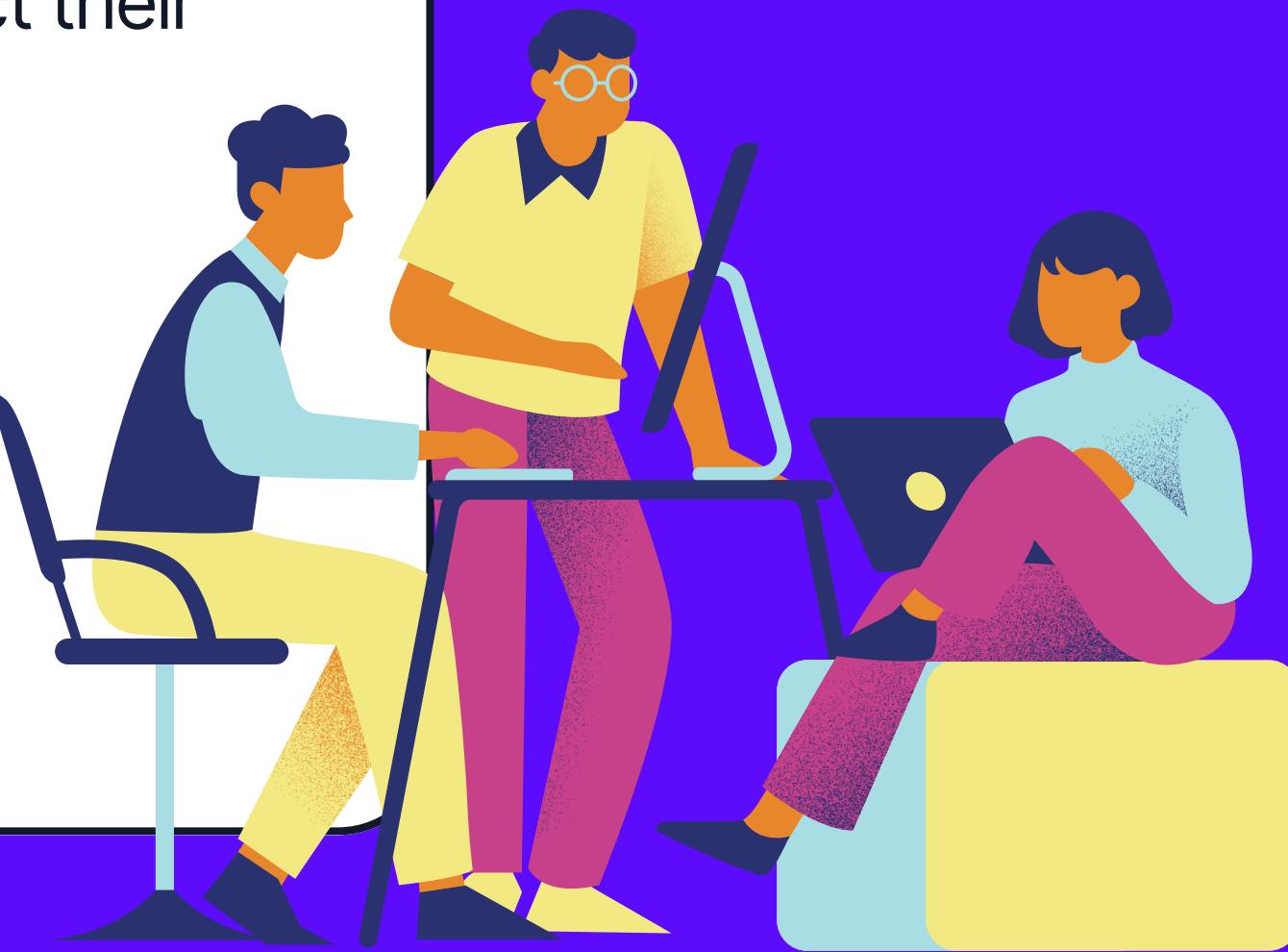
Scenario follow-up

Dua remembers **Standard 7.2: "You must support and encourage others to report concerns and not prevent anyone from raising concerns."** She reassures her peer that it is right to raise the issue and offers to go with them to speak to their practice educator. Together, they explain that they are worried about the impact on patient wellbeing. Afterwards, Dua checks in with her peer and encourages them to follow up if no action is taken, linking this to **Standard 7.6 on escalating concerns if necessary.**

My role, my responsibilities

7 Minutes

1 What is your role (or future role) in healthcare?

Fill in the key responsibilities that you think this role entails.

2 What does 'speaking up for safety' mean in this role?

Describe why it is important to raise concerns and why it is part of your professional responsibility for patients, the public, and your team.

3 Imagine you witness unsafe practice or unprofessional behaviour. What could you do?

List 2–3 constructive options. Who could you speak to? How might you approach it?

4 What might stop you from raising a concern — and how can you prepare to overcome it?

Think about fear, confidence, and peer pressure. But also consider what you can seek out (e.g. training, mentors, clear procedures) to feel prepared and supported.

DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE & PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

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WITH ENHANCED REFLECTION I COULD:

- Learn how to address uncomfortable issues with professionalism and care

- Learn how to implement professional guidance during practice confidently, even under pressure

- Build confidence to give respectful feedback and speak up with peers or senior colleagues — even when it feels difficult

IMAGINE THE CHANGES:

- Raise concerns early, prevent harm, provide a safe environment and demonstrate ethical responsibility

- Stay grounded in **HCPC's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics**, apply the **duty of candou**r, following practical advice from the HCPC's "**Getting it right when things go wrong" webinar** , **Overcoming the challenges of being candid**, **on** the student guidance hub

- Contribute to safer patient care, enhance collaboration, and uphold ethical standards of transparency and honesty in practice
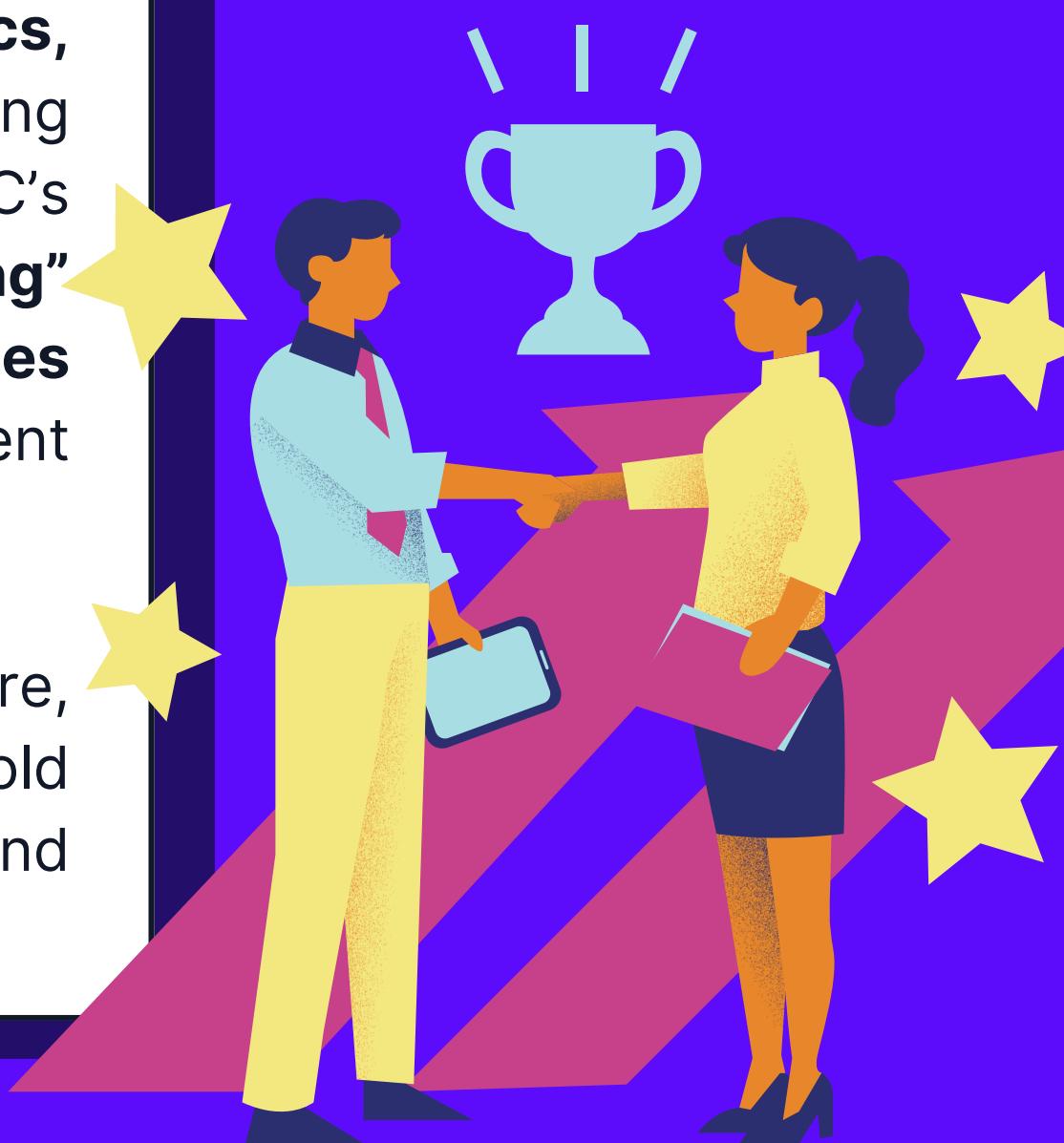
REFLECTIVE CHECKLIST:

|		YES	NO
1	I am familiar with the **HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics**	○	○
2	I understand how to raise a concern under **HCPC guidance for students**	○	○
3	I know what the **duty of candour** means and when it applies	○	○
4	I feel confident in recognising when patient safety or professionalism might be at risk	○	○
5	I know where to go or who to approach if I witness a **concern** in **placement or practice**	○	○
3	I've read or used the **HCPC student hub resource**s to support my decision-making	○	○
4	I actively reflect on my decisions and link them back to professional standards or expectations	○	○
5	I know the importance of giving feedback and speaking up even when it involves peers or senior staff	○	○

NEW WEBINAR
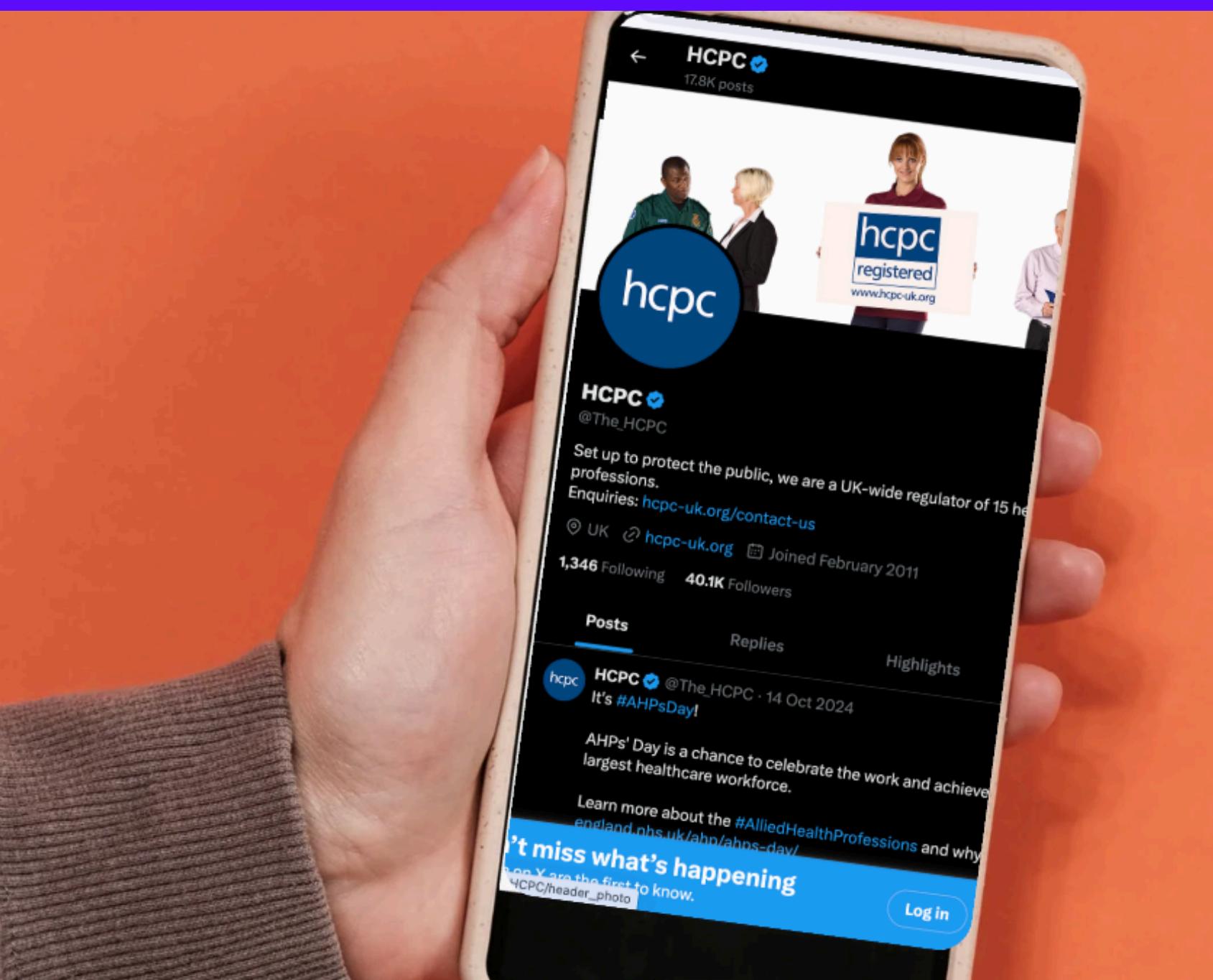
HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/@HCPC

HTTPS://X.COM/THE_HCPC?

WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW

WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW - WATCH NOW

REPORTING CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY CAN BE DAUNTING , BUT THE HCPC IS HERE TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH THIS. WHEN THINGS GO WRONG, BEING OPEN AND REPORTING CONCERNS IS NOT ONLY A RESPONSIBILITY, IT'S A WAY TO PROTECT OURSELVES, OUR COLLEAGUES, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, OUR SERVICE USERS. IT'S OUR PROFESSIONAL DUTY TO ACT WITH CANDOUR. #MYHCPC

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