

## **Peer Education in College Health Reconsidered: Weighing the Benefits and Costs**

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### **Questions to Consider**

- What do I know about the situation (who, what, where, when, how long)?
  - In what role am I responding (administrator, instructor, clinician, other...multiple roles)?
  - Who are the students involved and what is the nature of my relationship with them (am I grading them, are they former counseling clients of mine, ...)?
  - What are my options for intervening and what are the potential outcomes?
  - Who will potentially be affected by my response?
  - Who should I communicate with before, during, and after the response?
  - Who should be involved in delivering the response?
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### **Her Only Hope**

Two days prior to your departure to travel to a national peer education conference, you learn that one of the peer educators who will be traveling in your group has made a suicide threat by telling a peer that she was planning to kill herself by driving her car into a tree. The peer educator was transported to the local psychiatric emergency room for evaluation and was released the following day (the day prior to the trip). After her release from the ER, the student and her mother come to your office and tell you about what happened and the student states clearly that she still wants to go on the trip. When you ask the student's mother what she thinks about this, she gives her wholehearted support for travel, indicating to you that she wants her daughter to go to the conference with you and the other peer educators. The student's mother adds that the trip is a positive thing in her daughter's life and she trusts that her daughter will be safe and well-supervised in your hands. The student tells you that the trip is the only positive thing in her life right now, and not being permitted to travel with you would devastate her. *What do you do?*

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### **Cooking Up Conflict**

Your peer educators want to embark on a new initiative for incoming freshmen on Indian Quad entitled "Freshmen Recruitment Initiative and Educational Development", AKA "FRIED". You are concerned about the interpretation of the acronym, from which the students plan to develop T-shirts and other giveaways, in light of the alcohol and drug abuse prevention mission of your program. When raising your concerns with the students, a vocal peer education program undergraduate student officer, Chris, responds that he and the other officers don't care what you think, and if you stop them from using the FRIED name, they will report this issue to the student government leadership for violation of their free speech rights and rights to operate as a student organization. As part of their complaint in the event their free speech rights are violated, the student officers plan to ask the student government to cut the student government funding to your program that supports two salary lines, effective immediately. *What do you do?*

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### **A Matter of Trust**

One of your peer educators, Anna, comes to your office and tells you she is pregnant and plans to have an abortion. She asks you to help her find a clinic which would conduct the abortion for her. She adds that she does not have transportation to get to her clinic procedure and asks if you could take her there, saying that she would be embarrassed to have anyone else know about her situation. Anna tells you that she has been very depressed about this issue for a few weeks and it took a lot for her to decide to have the abortion and to take the risk to ask for your help and support as she goes through this stressful situation. In fact, you have noted that Anna has been quiet in class recently and you did not know why. Though you are surprised at her request, you want to respond in a manner that will be understanding and will not make her shut down.

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**Keeping the Fath**

Students in your peer education group want more variety in condoms and dental dams for a sexual health program. The fiscal technician refuses to approve the order, citing religious convictions and concern that the products will encourage students to have casual sex.

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**Saving Face(book)**

As part of his role as a peer educator in the group you supervise, Richard works with the student newspaper to submit articles for a weekly wellness-focused column developed by your peer education group. While you are reading the student newspaper one day, you note that Richard has also begun to write a series of local bar reviews, recommending which bars might be “good places to pick up girls.” You inform the peer education group’s undergraduate student President, Amanda, of Richard’s writing articles about local bars and she feels that this behavior is not consistent with the alcohol/drug abuse prevention mission of your peer education group and dismisses him from his officer position. Several weeks after he is dismissed as an officer, Richard emails you with several pictures he downloaded from Amanda’s private Facebook profile showing her consuming alcohol at several parties. You know that Amanda is under age 21. According to the peer education group student organization constitution, the advisor has the authority to remove the peer education group undergraduate student President from his or her position for behavior that violates the agency’s prevention mission. As if this line of facts was not enough to think about, it comes to your attention from a third Middle Earth officer, Beth, that last summer Richard attempted to begin a romantic relationship with Amanda, but she dumped him in early September., before Richard even had his first chance to put pen to paper for his first bar series article in the student newspaper. *What do you do?*

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