Resolving complaints about doctors faster

Meeting with doctors

General Medical Council
What is the Doctor Liaison Service?

When we are investigating a complaint about a doctor, the Doctor Liaison Service helps to improve the way we and the doctor share information. We meet the doctor at the end of the investigation to explain what factors about a case are of most concern to us. The doctor can then share information that we may not already be aware of and that may help us to understand the case and decide the appropriate course of action.

We launched this service in 2015 following a successful pilot.

Why are we offering this service?

Hearings can be very stressful for both witnesses and doctors. By sharing information earlier, we can better identify whether a hearing is needed. We have found that, in some cases, meeting with doctors at the end of the investigation means we can avoid unnecessary hearings. This speeds up the resolution of cases and reduces the stress for all involved.

Which cases will the service cover?

We will invite most doctors to meet with us where the case may be referred to a hearing. You do not have to meet with us if you don’t want to – declining an invitation won’t impact on our view of your case, except you may have missed an opportunity to improve our understanding of it.

We won’t invite you to meet with us if:

- the concerns are solely about your health
- the concerns involve violence or sexual misconduct
- you have received a criminal custodial sentence
- you have knowingly practised without a licence.
We may also exclude cases where the nature of the concerns means that a meeting won’t add value. For example, if there is a reasonable likelihood a tribunal might decide to erase a doctor.

**Where are the meetings held?**

Meetings take place at our office in London. We plan to extend the service to our office in Manchester by the end of 2015.

**Who will be at the meetings?**

The meeting will be facilitated by a senior member of staff from the GMC, known as a case examiner, who in due course will be one of the two case examiners (one medical and one lay) making a decision about your case. One of our lawyers will also be there.

You can bring a representative from your medical defence organisation, a lawyer, a relative, a friend or another supporter to the meeting.

Alternatively, with sufficient notice, a doctor from the Doctor Support Service can come to the meeting with you – see below for further information.
What will happen during the meeting?

We will explain our initial view of the seriousness of the concerns, but nothing about the outcome of the case will be decided during the meeting.

You will be able to share with us any information that you think may assist in making our decision. For example, you may have completed training since the complaint was made that you believe has successfully addressed the gap in your knowledge.

For us to take new information into account, it must be supported by evidence and provided in writing within the 42-day deadline set out in our letter.

We are not able to have off-the-record discussions. In the unlikely event that you told us something we were not already aware of, which indicates that the risk to the public or to public confidence is greater than we thought, we can’t ignore it. But that is not the purpose of the meeting – it is instead for you to share information that may lessen our concerns.

If you would like a break during the meeting, please say so and we will pause the meeting.
What will happen after the meeting?

We will write to you to confirm the points that were discussed and any evidence you said you would consider sending as part of your formal written response. Our letter will be the only record we hold of the meeting – we do not take or retain any formal notes during the meeting but you can of course keep your own notes.

You should submit your response by the deadline set in our letter.

After this, two case examiners (including one who attended the meeting) will consider the evidence you have given us, together with the evidence we have gathered during our investigation, and decide what to do next.

How will we make sure meetings are fair to doctors?

- We recommend you obtain legal advice before a meeting and bring your representative to the meeting. Alternatively, you can bring a supporter from the Doctor Support Service or a relative, friend or other supporter. Anyone accompanying you to meeting must comply with our guidance on who is a fit and proper person to represent a doctor.

- There is no disadvantage if you choose not to attend a meeting, or if you attend and do not share information. But attending a meeting and sharing information may help to avoid an unnecessary hearing and to resolve the case much more quickly.
How will we make sure decisions made following meetings are robust enough to protect the public?

- Doctors must support any information they share with documentary evidence (e.g., copies of training certificates) for it to affect our decision.

- If there is a significant dispute about evidence, the case will be referred to a hearing.

- The decisions our staff make on what steps are needed to protect the public are audited to check they have followed our policies and procedures.

Support available to you – the Doctor Support Service

This service is free of charge and completely independent of the GMC – it is run by BMA Doctors for Doctors, but you don’t have to be a member of the BMA to use it. The service offers confidential and emotional support (not legal or medical advice) to any doctor involved in a fitness to practise case. You can contact the service by calling 020 7383 6707 (9 am–5 pm, Monday to Friday) or emailing doctorsupportservice@bma.org.uk.