



# How we investigate concerns about a doctor

Working with doctors Working for patients

General  
Medical  
Council

## **Making limited initial enquiries before deciding whether to investigate**

Sometimes we carry out a provisional enquiry to decide whether or not to investigate the concerns fully. This involves getting one or two easily obtainable pieces of information, such as:

- medical records.
- coroner's report.
- local investigation report.

We may also seek expert medical opinion or, in some circumstances, the opinions of the doctor's responsible officer to inform our decision-making. These enquiries are usually completed within 63 days.

## **What if we decide there are no issues that we need to investigate ourselves?**

If the concerns don't require us to restrict or stop the doctor from practising medicine in the UK, we may refer concerns to the doctor's responsible officer, or employers and organisations where the doctor works. They are often better placed to give an explanation and assess whether there are any wider problems that need to be addressed.

**When a serious concern about a doctor's behaviour, performance, or health is raised, we investigate to see if there is a risk to patient safety or the public's confidence in doctors.**

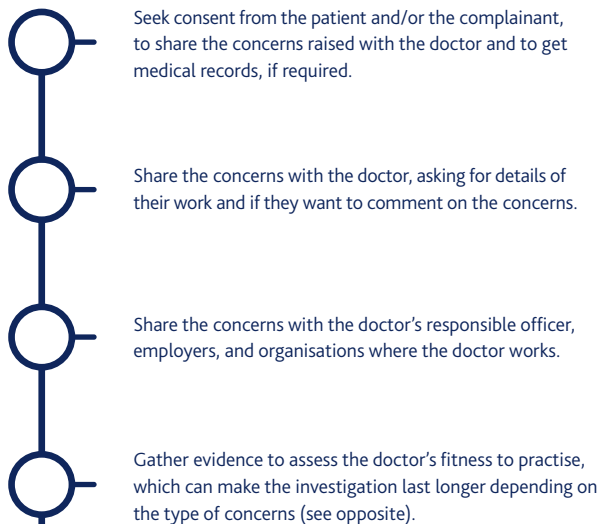
We normally only investigate concerns that could require us to restrict or stop the doctor from practising medicine in the UK.

We explain what we do if the concerns aren't as serious over the page, including if we decide to make some initial enquiries to better understand the concerns.

If we decide to investigate the concerns, an interim orders tribunal may restrict the doctor's practice or suspend them while we gather information. This action may be necessary for the protection of the public, or it's in the public or the doctor's interest to do so.

The diagram opposite outlines what we do to investigate concerns. You can find more information on our website:

[www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/](http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/)



**By law, we must carry out the tasks in this diagram before we can decide if a doctor's fitness to practise may be impaired. It takes six months to complete these tasks. When we're investigating complex allegations, it can take longer to collect evidence.**

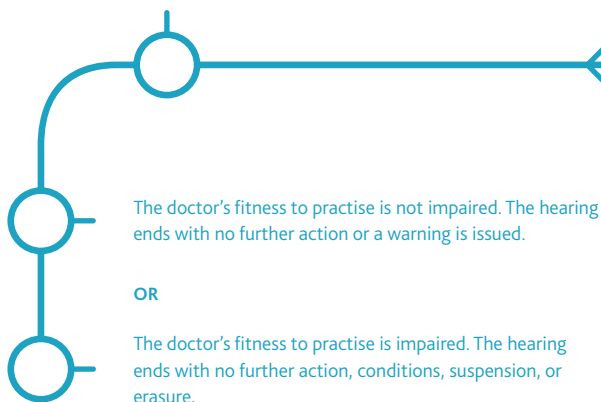
+6 months	Performance assessments
+3 months	Language and health assessments
+2 months	Expert reports and witness statements
+2 weeks	Medical records

## **Tribunals usually take an extra 9 months or more to finish.**

Refer the doctor to the MPTS for a medical practitioners tribunal hearing to decide whether the doctor's fitness to practise is impaired.

Share all the evidence with the doctor for comments. We may share some information with the patient, responsible officer, or employers.

Two senior decision-makers called case examiners (medical and lay) consider all the evidence to assess whether the doctor's fitness to practise may be impaired.



Case ends without a hearing, resulting in:

- no further action being taken
- the doctor being given advice
- the doctor being given a warning
- the doctor agreeing to undertakings.

# Commonly used terms

**Advice** highlights standards set out in *Good medical practice* for future reference.

**Conditions** restrict the doctor's right to work as imposed by a tribunal.

**Erasure** removes a doctor's name from the medical register, so they cannot work as a doctor in the UK.

**Fitness to practise** describes whether a doctor is following our standards and safe to treat patients.

**Interim orders tribunals** can suspend or restrict a doctor's right to work while an investigation continues.

**Medical practitioners tribunal service (MPTS)** hears the most serious cases where the GMC considers that a doctor's fitness to practise is likely to be impaired.

**Responsible officers** are licensed doctors. They deal with fitness to practise concerns, including approving any arrangements for a doctor who is subject to undertakings or conditions to practise safely.

**Suspension** removes a doctor from the medical register temporarily.

**Undertakings** restrict the doctor's right to work, as agreed between us and the doctor.

**Warnings** mark where the doctor's practice goes against our standards, even though their fitness to practise is not impaired.