



A guide for health professionals on how to report a doctor to the GMC

General
Medical
Council

Regulating doctors
Ensuring good medical practice



This booklet advises doctors, medical directors, clinical governance managers and other health professionals who may have concerns about a colleague what action to take if they have concerns about a doctor.

We provide separate guidance for patients who want to complain about a doctor, and for doctors who have been reported to the GMC.

What is the GMC and what does it do?

The GMC is responsible for regulating doctors, and is governed by a council made up of both doctors and members of the public.

The law gives the GMC four main functions under the Medical Act 1983:

- keeping up-to-date registers of qualified doctors
- fostering good medical practice
- promoting high standards of medical education
- dealing firmly and fairly with doctors whose fitness to practise is in doubt.

Any doctor wanting to practise medicine in the UK must, by law, be both registered and hold a licence to practise. Our fitness to practise powers extend to all registered doctors.

When can we take action?

We can take action if a doctor's fitness to practise is impaired. This may be for a number of reasons:

- misconduct
- poor performance
- a criminal conviction or caution in the UK or elsewhere for an offence that would be a criminal offence if committed in the UK
- physical or mental ill health
- a determination (decision) by a regulatory body either in the UK or overseas.

If a doctor's fitness to practise is found to be impaired, we can suspend or remove them from the medical register or place conditions on their registration.

We can also issue a warning to a doctor if their fitness to practise is not impaired but there has been a significant departure from the principles set out in our guidance, *Good Medical Practice*.

Our role in context

Our role in registering doctors and our fitness to practise procedures are part of a wider system of healthcare regulation in the UK. We recommend that, whenever possible, patients take their concerns through local procedures before reporting a case to us.

Similarly, if a medical professional has concerns about one of their colleagues we would normally expect them to deal with the problem at a local level first of all. We always consider carefully any concerns about a doctor that are brought to our attention. If we consider that it would be more appropriate for particular concerns to be considered locally, we refer the matter to the doctor's employer.

If we decide to investigate concerns further, we will also contact employers to find out whether there are any wider concerns about the doctor's fitness to practise. If you are not sure whether the GMC should be involved, please contact us on 0161 923 6602 and we will advise you.

The National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS)

1st Floor, Market Tower, 1 Nine Elms Lane, London SW8 5NQ
Telephone: 020 7062 1655

For NCAS offices in Wales, Scotland and N.Ireland see www.ncas.npsa.nhs.uk

NCAS can advise health care organisations on:

- the handling of concerns
- the professional performance of individual doctors
- effective local systems for handling poor performance.

It will also carry out assessments of doctors if there are concerns about poor professional performance but patient safety is not considered to be at sufficient risk to call into question the doctor's fitness to practise without restriction.

How you can help

Most concerns about doctors will be handled locally without involving the GMC. However, you should inform us if there is evidence that suggests the doctor may not be fit to practise.

In the past we have taken action where a doctor has, for instance:

- made serious or repeated mistakes in diagnosing or treating a patient's condition
- not examined a patient properly or not responded to reasonable requests for treatment
- misused information about patients
- treated patients without their consent
- behaved dishonestly in financial matters, in dealing with patients, or in research
- made sexual advances towards a patient
- misused alcohol or drugs.

We consider every case carefully, and on its own merits. If you believe a doctor's behaviour is, for whatever reason, putting patients or anyone else at risk of serious harm, you should let us know straight away.

Before you report a doctor to us you may wish to discuss your concerns with a member of our Investigation Team. You can contact them by calling our helpline on 0161 923 6602 or by emailing us at **practise@gmc-uk.org**

We can tell you if we are the right organisation to deal with the matters you have raised. If we are not the best place to start, we can advise you who else to contact. This may reduce delays and help to ensure that doctors who are not safe are dealt with quickly and effectively.

What will happen if you report a doctor to us?

Ideally we will need the following information in writing, so that we can begin an investigation:

- the doctor's full name and GMC reference number
- the doctor's address, or the address of the hospital or practice where they work
- a full account of the events that concern you, with dates if possible
- copies of any relevant papers and any other evidence you have
- details of any action that has already been taken locally in response to the concerns
- details of anyone else who will support the complaint.

If you are concerned that by providing information you may be breaching patient confidentiality, you may wish to take advice from the GMC, your defence organisation or your union.

If we decide to act on your concerns, we may ask you for permission to show the doctor your letter or statement. If the case proceeds to a formal hearing, you might be asked to attend as a witness. If you are, we will pay your expenses for attending the hearing.

Time limits

We do not normally investigate complaints about matters that took place more than five years previously, unless we consider that it is in the public interest to do so.

What we cannot do

Our legal powers enable us to take action if there is evidence that it is necessary to remove or restrict the doctor's right to practise. But there are instances when we cannot act. In particular we cannot:

- deal with concerns or complaints about nurses, pharmacists, dentists, opticians, hospital or practice managers or administrative staff, or anyone who is not a registered doctor (other healthcare professionals have their own regulatory bodies and complaints procedures)
- provide advice on standards of practice applicable to other healthcare professionals (the regulatory bodies for those professions will be able to help)
- arbitrate in practice or departmental disputes
- intervene in local disciplinary procedures
- provide advice to doctors whose employers are considering taking action against them (doctors in this position should consult their medical defence organisation or the British Medical Association)
- make a doctor apologise to a patient or professional colleague
- order a doctor to provide a patient with the treatment they want
- pay compensation to a patient or fine a doctor.

Our procedures are explained in full in our factsheet *A guide to the Fitness to Practise procedures*, which can be downloaded from our website at www.gmc-uk.org/concerns

Other GMC publications

A guide for doctors reported to the GMC

How to complain about a doctor

Factsheets at www.gmc-uk.org/concerns

The GMC's fitness to practise procedures

Warnings

Performance assessments

Health assessments

Undertakings

Investigating concerns

London

Regent's Place, 350 Euston Road, London NW1 3JN

Manchester

3 Hardman Street, Manchester M3 3AW

Scotland

5th Floor, The Tun, 4 Jackson's Entry, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Wales

Regus House, Falcon Drive, Cardiff Bay CF10 4RU

Northern Ireland

9th Floor, Bedford House, 16-22 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7FD

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The GMC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278) and Scotland (SC037750)

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