

Stream 2: Guidance for doctors

- 1 This fact sheet is aimed at doctors who are the subject of a complaint. It explains how we handle those complaints that we consider are not for the GMC to investigate, but forward the complaint to a doctor's employer to enquire as to whether there are any wider concerns about a doctor's fitness to practise. We also have more general guidance for doctors who are referred to the GMC called *A Guide for Doctors referred to the GMC*.

The role of the GMC

- 2 Our powers and our sanctions are linked to our responsibilities for maintaining the register of doctors able to practise medicine in the UK. The GMC's fitness to practise procedures focus on the most serious concerns, which call into a question a doctor's fitness to practise and suitability to retain unrestricted registration as a doctor – that is his or her right to practise medicine anywhere in the UK.

How we handle complaints

- 3 We receive around 5,000 complaints each year. Many of these complaints do not appear to raise issues that would require us to take action to remove or restrict a doctor's right to practise. We normally only investigate complaints that could result in formal action. However, we try to ensure that those complaints that we do not investigate are forwarded quickly to the most appropriate organisation, normally the doctor's employer or contracting body.
- 4 We review all new complaints to identify which we will need to investigate ourselves because they are potentially serious. We refer to these as Stream 1 complaints.
- 5 Many of the complaints we receive fall outside this category. This is because the concerns raised, on their own, are unlikely to require us to take formal action against the doctor's registration. We refer to these as Stream 2 complaints.
- 6 In Stream 2 complaints, we will conduct a preliminary investigation meaning we will contact the doctor's employer/contracting body and ask them to confirm whether there are any immediate concerns about the doctor's fitness to practise that might require any further GMC investigation.

What action is expected of the employer?

- 8 It is a matter for the employer to decide in each case what action, if any, is required. In particular, the employer will need to decide whether it needs to investigate the complaint.
- 9 We ask the employer to confirm to us whether or not they are aware of any serious concerns about the doctor that might require us to take action to protect patients.

Communication with the doctor

- 11 In order to conduct a preliminary investigation, we will write to the doctor to obtain details of their employer(s)/contracting organisation(s). This is so that we can contact them with a copy of the complaint and ask them to confirm whether there are any immediate concerns that call into question the doctor's fitness to practise and that might require action by the GMC.
- 12 We would normally only contact the doctor again if the employer identified concerns that we needed to consider ourselves (see below).

What will happen if the employer identifies any concerns

- 13 If the doctor's employer(s)/contracting organisation(s) identifies any serious concerns about the doctor, either relating to the particular complaint or more generally, we will undertake our own investigation into the doctor's fitness to practise within our Stream 1 process. At the end of our preliminary investigation, two case examiners will decide whether to refer the doctor to a Fitness to Practise Panel hearing to consider the doctor's fitness to practise.

Further information

- 14 More information about the GMC's fitness to practise procedures is available on our website www.gmc-uk.org.