

# Health Assessments

## Introduction

- 1 This fact sheet is aimed at doctors who may be required to undergo a health assessment.
- 2 This leaflet is only intended as a guide to our procedures. It is not a substitute for obtaining independent advice from your defence organisation or solicitors.
- 3 The GMC is responsible for registering doctors to practise in the UK. Its statutory purpose is to protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine. Our fitness to practise procedures focus on whether a doctor's fitness to practise is impaired to such an extent that we need to take action on registration. This means that we are looking to see whether the issues are so serious that the doctor's registration should be restricted or removed – in effect, whether the doctor should be prevented from working, or allowed to work only under certain conditions.
- 4 We can take action if the doctor's fitness to practise is impaired. This may be for a number of reasons:
  - misconduct
  - deficient performance
  - a criminal conviction or caution in the British Isles (or elsewhere for an offence which would be a criminal offence if committed in England or Wales)
  - physical or mental ill-health
  - a determination (decision) by a regulatory body either in the British Isles or overseas.
- 5 We can also take action where the doctor's fitness to practise is not impaired, but there has been a significant departure from the principles set out in the GMC's guidance, *Good Medical Practice*, but a restriction on the doctor's registration is not necessary. A warning may be issued to the doctor in these circumstances. This will be disclosed to a doctor's employer and to any other enquirer during a five-year period. A warning will not be appropriate where the concerns relate exclusively to a doctor's physical or mental health.

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- 6 Although there is a single test of impaired fitness to practise, the nature of the investigation carried out by the GMC will depend on the concerns raised with us. Where the concerns relate to a doctor's physical or mental health, we may require the doctor to undergo a health assessment. A health assessment may form one part of a wider investigation into a doctor's fitness to practise.

## The assessment process

- 7 The assessment will take the form of an examination of the doctor's physical or mental health by two doctors selected by the GMC. In many cases, these doctors will be psychiatrists.
- 8 Where the doctor is willing to undergo the assessment, the GMC will make arrangements for the examinations to take place
- 9 The two doctors carrying out the examinations will prepare a report covering:
  - whether the doctor is fit to practise either generally or in a limited way
  - any recommendations about the management of the case.

## Refusal to undergo assessment

- 10 If the doctor refuses to undergo an assessment or fails to cooperate with the assessment process, the case will be referred to a Fitness to Practise Panel to consider whether the doctor's fitness to practise is impaired and whether action is required on his/her registration.

## Decision by case examiners

- 11 Following the health assessment, the case will be considered by two senior GMC staff known as case examiners (one medical and one non-medical). The case examiners will consider all the evidence that has been gathered during the investigation and not just the contents of the health assessment report. There

are a number of options available to the case examiners at this stage:

- conclude the case with no further action
- refer the case to a Fitness to Practise panel
- agree undertakings (see separate fact sheet on *Undertakings* for further information)
- issue a warning except where the issue relates solely to a doctor's health (see separate fact sheet on *Warnings* for further information.)