



# How to complain about a doctor

General  
Medical  
Council

Regulating doctors  
Ensuring good medical practice



This booklet is for patients in Northern Ireland. Our procedures are the same throughout the UK, but healthcare and support organisations do vary.

We have therefore also produced booklets for patients in England, Scotland and Wales. If you would like one of these booklets, or if you would like one in a different format or language, please phone 0161 923 6602.

# How to complain about a doctor

This booklet explains what to do if you are unhappy with the way a doctor has treated you or cared for you. At the General Medical Council (GMC), we recognise the importance of complaints in helping us to regulate the medical profession and to protect patients. We are just one of the organisations responsible for considering patients' concerns.

## What can I do if I am concerned about a doctor?

If you want an apology, an explanation or a review of your treatment, you should first contact the place where you received care.

Most complaints about doctors can be settled locally, and more quickly, by the doctor's employers. The NHS hospital, GP practice, private hospital or clinic where you received care has its own complaints procedures. Please contact them for details.

In Northern Ireland the Patient and Client Council seeks to represent the views of the public in all areas of health and social care services. They can help you to make a complaint.

The Patient and Client Council does not investigate complaints but seeks to give accurate and impartial advice on the options open to you. As the owner of the complaint you are responsible for taking the complaint forward. However, they can advise you on how to make a complaint, who to make a complaint to, and help you with making your complaint.

In some cases the Patient and Client Council staff will draft letters for you and accompany you to meetings.

The Patient and Client Council can be contacted on freephone number 0800 9170222 or you can visit their website [www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net](http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net) for more details.

The Northern Ireland Ombudsman can also investigate complaints about doctors. You can contact them on their freephone number 0800 343424 or you can visit their website [www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk) for more details. However, before becoming involved, the Ombudsman will normally expect complainants to have used and exhausted the Health and Social Care Service Complaints Procedure.

The GMC has an online, interactive guide to making complaints called *Patients' help*. This can be found, along with all our complaints leaflets and forms at [www.gmc-uk.org/concerns](http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns)

## What do I do if I have a more serious complaint?

The GMC is responsible for ensuring that doctors in the UK meet the standards of good medical practice we set for them. This means we can take action in more serious cases if we need to stop a doctor from practising or to restrict their practice in some way.

If you think your doctor is not fit to practise or may be a risk to patients, then please contact us.

If you're not sure whether to report a doctor to us, it may be helpful to discuss your concerns with us by ringing 0161 923 6602. All calls are confidential and we will advise you on what to do.

These are examples of the types of cases in which we may need to act:

- serious or repeated mistakes in carrying out medical procedures or in diagnosis, such as prescribing drugs in a dangerous way
- failure to examine a patient properly or to respond reasonably to a patient's needs
- fraud or dishonesty
- serious breaches of a patient's confidentiality
- any serious criminal offence.

If you think that a doctor has committed a criminal offence, you should contact the police as well as the GMC.

## How do I report a doctor to the GMC?

If you have any questions please ring the helpline number on 0161 923 6602.

You can report a doctor to the GMC by:

- writing to us at the General Medical Council Fitness to Practise Directorate, 3 Hardman Street, Manchester M3 3AW
- emailing us at [practise@gmc-uk.org](mailto:practise@gmc-uk.org) or
- filling in and returning the complaint form at the back of this booklet.

We will need the following information from you:

- the doctor's name and work address
- an explanation of your concerns – with dates
- copies of any supporting documents such as relevant medical records
- the names and addresses of anyone else who can support the facts around your concerns.

Please note that it will be difficult for us to investigate complaints if you want to remain anonymous.

### **What will the GMC do with my complaint about a doctor?**

We review all complaints carefully to see if there are issues that we need to investigate. If we decide that we do not need to investigate, we may pass the complaint to the doctor's employer so that it can be handled locally.

If we do decide to investigate, we will need to show the doctor your complaint. Once we have received their comments, we will give you a chance to respond. We will also send you a factsheet called *Investigating concerns* that explains the procedures in more detail.

Once we have collected the information we need, the case will be considered by two case examiners (one medical, the other non-medical) who are senior GMC staff. They will consider whether the concerns are serious enough for the doctor to attend a hearing. If they are, a panel will decide at the hearing if the doctor is fit to practise. A Fitness to Practise Panel hearing is the final stage of our procedures.

### **What can the GMC do?**

If we identify concerns about the doctor that mean we need to take action, we can:

- issue a warning to the doctor
- put conditions on the doctor's registration so that they are only allowed to do medical work under supervision, or so that they are restricted to certain areas of practice
- agree undertakings, for example they agree to retrain or work under supervision
- suspend the doctor's name from the register – so that they cannot practise during the suspension period
- remove the doctor's name from the register so that they cannot practise at all.

## What can't the GMC do?

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
- give you a detailed explanation of what happened to you – this can only come from the doctor or the healthcare organisation
- order a doctor to provide the treatment you want
- help you with a claim for compensation
- fine a doctor
- make a doctor apologise to you.

## How long will it take for the GMC to consider my complaint?

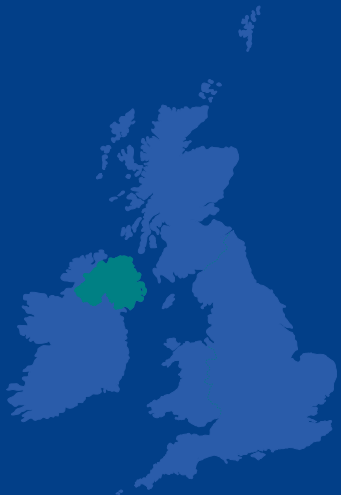
We appreciate that making a complaint can be stressful, so we will try to consider your complaint as quickly as we can. If we decide to investigate your complaint, we will give you an idea of how long our enquiries will take.

## What if I am not happy with the way the GMC has handled my complaint?

We will keep you informed of any action we are taking and provide you with a clear explanation for our decisions. If you are not happy with the way we have handled your complaint, please discuss the problem with the person who handled your complaint. You may contact their manager if you are still unhappy, or email **customerservicemanager@gmc-uk.org**

## Other help from the GMC

The GMC has an online, interactive guide to making complaints called *Patients' help*. This can be found, along with all our complaints leaflets and forms at **www.gmc-uk.org/concerns**



## Where can I find out more information?

### General Medical Council

3 Hardman Street, Manchester M3 3AW

### GMC Northern Ireland office

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

**Fitness to Practise telephone:** 0161 923 6602

**Email:** [practise@gmc-uk.org](mailto:practise@gmc-uk.org) | **Website:** [www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org)

**Outside the UK telephone:** +44(0)161 923 6602

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

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