1 December 2016

Dear ____________

I am writing to highlight a range of concerns reported in our annual survey of doctors in training and trainers about the quality of medical education and training provided by trusts and boards across the UK.

As the regulator of medical education and training we are responsible for setting standards and working with local training providers to ensure that these are being met. Our national training survey is a key tool that we use to monitor standards and the quality of local training. Today we have published an analysis of our 2016 survey. While most doctors rate the quality of their training experience as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’, our report also reveals some areas of real concern.

Doctors have told us, in significant numbers, that current workloads are threatening the time they need to train and be trained:

- four in ten doctors in training told us their workload was ‘heavy’ or ‘very heavy’. These figures are worse for doctors training in those specialties which are under the greatest amount of pressure and demand from patients – such as emergency medicine – and they appear to have grown worse over the past five years
- between 50 - 60% of doctors in training reported that they are working beyond their rostered hours every week
- up to 25% said their working patterns left them sleep deprived on a weekly basis
- and one in three trainers reported they did not have adequate time to fulfil their role.

Our analysis also found that rota gaps were a significant issue for many doctors in training. We have made a commitment to investigate this issue further by adding questions to future national training surveys.
Clearly these concerns are one more sign of the pressure which healthcare services are under, and I do appreciate the challenges which your organisation must be facing, especially now that we are in the winter months. However those responsible and accountable for the delivery of medical education locally must take the appropriate steps to ensure the training of doctors remains protected – particularly as medical training is so often a bellwether for the quality and safety of patient care, and because patients are directly at risk if the support and supervision of doctors in training is inadequate.

Our standards for medical education and training (Promoting excellence) are very clear on these points, and I want to take this opportunity to remind you what they say:

- Organisations must have effective, transparent and clearly understood educational governance systems and processes to manage or control the quality of medical education and training.

- Organisations must design rotas to:
  - make sure doctors in training have appropriate clinical supervision
  - support doctors in training to develop the professional values, knowledge, skills and behaviours required of all doctors working in the UK
  - provide learning opportunities that allow doctors in training to meet the requirements of their curriculum and training programme
  - give doctors in training access to educational supervisors
  - minimise the adverse effects of fatigue and workload.

- Trainers must have enough time in job plans to meet their educational responsibilities so that they can carry out their role in a way that promotes safe and effective care and a positive learning experience.

There is a need for vigilance and action – nationally as well as locally – to ensure the quality of UK medical education and training is protected in these very difficult times. Where there is evidence that our standards are not being met, we can and will take action.

I would urge you and your board to review the national training survey results for your organisation (available at www.gmc-uk.org/nts) and consider what steps you can take to improve the experiences of doctors who are delivering training, and those being trained, such as reviewing your organisation’s rota designs to ensure they comply fully with our standards.

We are working with an increasing number of trusts and boards to support them to maintain and improve education quality in their organisation. If you have any questions about the national training survey results or our standards for medical education and training, please don’t hesitate to let me know.

Best wishes,

Charlie Massey
Chief Executive and Registrar