

Business plan 2015

About us

The General Medical Council (GMC) is an independent organisation that helps to protect patients and improve medical education and practice across the UK.

- We decide which doctors are qualified to work here and we oversee UK medical education and training.
- We set the standards that doctors need to follow, and make sure that they continue to meet these standards throughout their careers.
- We take action to prevent a doctor from putting the safety of patients, or the public's confidence in doctors, at risk.

Every patient should receive a high standard of care. Our role is to help achieve that by working closely with doctors, their employers and patients, to make sure that the trust patients have in their doctors is fully justified.

We are a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278) and Scotland (SCO37750). Our work is in support of our charitable purpose of the protection, promotion and maintenance of the health and safety of the community by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine.

Our *Corporate strategy 2014–17* sets out the challenges we face and how we are responding to them while maintaining and improving our regulatory functions. This document sets out our priorities for 2015 to deliver against our strategy.

Our core work

Our key priority for 2015 is maintaining the quality of our core regulatory functions.

Registering doctors – There are 270,000 doctors on the UK medical register. We check every doctor's identity and qualifications before they are able to join the register. We also check with others, such as the doctor's medical school or previous employers, to find out if they have any concerns about the doctor's ability to practise safely. Each year, we process over 30,000 registration applications and register around 20,000 new doctors.

Overseeing doctors' education and training – We set the educational standards for all UK doctors through undergraduate and postgraduate education and training. To test whether our standards are being met, we carry out monitoring and inspections across over 30 medical schools and all deaneries and local education and training boards in the UK. This includes talking to medical students and doctors in training about their experiences and responding directly to any concerns raised.

Setting the standards for doctors – Our standards define what makes a good doctor by setting out the professional values, knowledge, skills and behaviours required of all doctors working in the UK. We regularly review our standards to make sure they continue to reflect the values of a wide range of people, including patients, doctors, employers and educators.

Helping to raise standards through revalidation –

It is important that every doctor practising in the UK is competent and that their knowledge and skills are up to date. We work with employers to make sure every doctor has an annual check or appraisal. Every five years, we ask for formal confirmation that each doctor is following our standards. This system of checks is called revalidation. It gives doctors the opportunity to reflect on their practice, including feedback from colleagues and patients. Over time, revalidation should help to drive up the standards of care that patients receive, by helping to identify problems earlier and by helping all doctors to reflect on their practice, understand what they do well and how they can improve. We expect to process over 70,000 revalidation recommendations in 2015.

Investigating and acting on concerns about doctors –

When a serious concern is raised about a doctor's behaviour, health or performance, we investigate to see if the doctor is putting the safety of patients, or the public's confidence in doctors, at risk. This can be a particularly challenging part of our work. The volume of concerns raised with us has grown significantly in recent years. We expect this trend to continue in 2015 with over 10,000 concerns likely to be raised. We have added additional resources to our teams to help deal with this demand and will focus our efforts on continuing to provide timely and high quality investigation.

Adjudicating on concerns – Sometimes we refer a case to the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) for a hearing. When action is needed to protect the public or to maintain public confidence in doctors, an MPTS panel can suspend a doctor's right to work, or restrict their practice – for example by requiring them to work under supervision, or undergo further training. If necessary, a panel can also suspend or restrict a doctor's right to work while the investigation is conducted. In a few very serious cases, a doctor may be removed from the medical register. The MPTS is part of the GMC. However, it operates separately from the rest of our work. The MPTS expects to support around 2,800 hearing days during 2015.

Delivering our strategy

Make the best use of intelligence about doctors and the healthcare environment to ensure good standards and identify risks to patients

We will continue to develop smarter ways of using our data. Our ability to understand and respond to the rapid changes in the healthcare environment, particularly risks to patients, is reliant on how well we can understand and respond to what we learn from our data. Our work in 2015 will include the following.

- Considering a national licensing exam. Medicine is an increasingly mobile profession. We believe it would be fairer and more reassuring to the public for there to be a single standard for entry to the register that everyone can rely on.
- Delivering our data strategy which sets out how we will develop and use our data. We are focusing on how we can better understand the different stages of each medical career and the different environments in which doctors work.
- Continuing the work we have undertaken in 2014 to improve the way we work with systems regulators and share concerns. We will continue to expand these relationships with organisations and improve the processes and systems that support our work together.
- Implementing the recommendations of our review of the Professional and Linguistics Assessments Board test.

Help raise standards in medical education and practice

The most effective way for us to protect patients is to work with doctors to help make sure they have the education, training and resources they need to achieve high standards of professionalism and medical ethics. Our work in 2015 will include the following.

- Publishing updated guidance on confidentiality, new guidance on cosmetic practice and joint guidance with the Nursing and Midwifery Council on the professional duty of candour.
- Implementing the assessment process for the revalidation of doctors who don't have a connection to a designated organisation in the UK.
- Continuing with our evaluation of the impact that revalidation has on doctors and healthcare organisations, and the contribution it is making to the quality of patient care. We've commissioned research that will cover the first cycle of revalidation. Through understanding the impact of revalidation over time, we can identify opportunities for further improvements.
- Researching why different doctors achieve different outcomes as part of their assessments in postgraduate education. We will also consider the outcomes of research into our fitness to practise processes to understand the role of cultural bias, and how this may affect which groups of doctors are represented in our processes. This is an important part of implementing our *Equality and diversity strategy 2014–17*.
- Implementing the recommendations from the review of our approach to the quality assurance of medical education and training. This will include consulting on revised standards for medical education and training.

Improve the level of engagement and efficiency in the handling of complaints about doctors

We can only make our processes more effective by working closely with doctors, employers and patients or their relatives. Complaints about a doctor's practice need to be managed by the right person, in a way that is proportionate to the severity of the complaint and reduces the stress for all involved. Our work in 2015 will include the following.

- Continuing to work with the UK Government, Parliament and departments of health across the UK to maintain momentum on the work of the Law Commissions. Changes in the legislation that governs our role could help us introduce a range of reforms that would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our work.
- Implementing changes that will establish the MPTS on a statutory basis and give the GMC the power to appeal decisions of panels. This is an important change that will enable us to appeal when a panel decision does not protect the public, a power that doesn't currently exist. These changes will also improve some of the rules for our hearings, making them more effective and helping to reduce unnecessary delays.
- Consulting on the publication and disclosure of fitness to practise information. We need to make sure that the way we handle historical information and the approach we take to publication of this is consistent and fair.
- Rolling out our meetings with complainants across the UK through our patient liaison service. These meetings are designed to make sure we fully understand the details of a person's concerns and to explain how we will investigate them. After we have concluded our investigation, the meetings give us a chance to explain what has happened and why.

Work more closely with doctors, medical students and patients on the frontline of care

Our ability to successfully engage doctors in raising standards relies on us working more closely with others, including patients, educators, employers, medical students, and other healthcare professionals and regulators. By understanding more about the daily challenges that doctors face, we can learn more about what motivates and influences their behaviour and engage them more successfully. Our work in 2015 will include the following.

- Continuing to use technology to make our professional standards easier to access and targeted specifically to the variety of doctors' roles. We will be releasing a smartphone application to help doctors log and reflect on their continuing professional development activities. We will also prepare for an overhaul of our website and broader digital channels to make them more useful and engaging.
- Delivering a number of events throughout the year to promote medical professionalism among doctors and medical students.
- Rolling out our Welcome to UK Practice events across the UK for doctors new to practice. We will also continue to maintain and develop our engagement and presence as a UK-wide regulator through our regional and employer liaison services and our offices in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- Using research we commissioned in 2014 to consider how patients, employers and others use the information we publish about doctors on the medical register, so we can find opportunities to improve its value to the users of the information.
- Developing a communications strategy to support effective engagement with all people and organisations interested in our work. This will reflect the findings of a survey we introduced last year to understand and track perceptions of us and our work.

Work better together to improve our overall effectiveness, our responsiveness and the delivery of our regulator function

It is essential that we continue to provide clear value for money, especially as demand for our services increases and pressures within the health service continue. Our work in 2015 will include the following.

- Continuing our corporate efficiency programme to encourage the ongoing effective use of our resources and improve productivity by pursuing a 3–5% efficiency target. We will start work on a review of how we work and explore what opportunities there are for increasing our efficiency target in 2015–16.
- Developing our people strategy to make sure that we are able to attract, retain and develop the right people.
- Improving our capacity across the organisation for quality and continuous improvement projects that deliver efficiencies in our operations.

Published February 2015

© 2015 General Medical Council

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

Code: GMC/BP15/0215