

Summary note of the meeting on 14 October 2020

Attendees

- Clare Marx, GMC Chair (Chair)
- Paul Darragh, British Medical Association (BMA) NI
- Joanne Donnelly, GMC Employer Liaison Adviser
- Laurence Dorman, Royal College of General Practitioners NI (RCGP NI)
- Christine Eames, GMC Council
- Chris Hagan, Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust
- Patricia Higgins, NI Social Care Council (NISCC)
- Robert Khan, GMC Assistant Director of Public Affairs and National Offices
- Jane Kennedy, GMC NI National Head
- Una Lane, GMC Director of Registration and Revalidation
- Charlie Massey, GMC Chief Executive
- Heather Moorhead, NI Confederation of Health and Social Care (NICON)
- Marion McCann, GMC Policy and External Affairs Manager (notes)
- Vivian McConvey, Patient and Client Council (PCC)
- Pascal McKeown, Queen's University Belfast (QUB)
- Mark Neale, Pharmaceutical Society of NI (PSNI)
- Margaret O'Brien, Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)
- Mark Roberts, Health and Safety Quality Improvement (HSCQI)
- Ian Steele, NI Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA)
- Tony Stevens, Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)
- Hugo van Woerden, Public Health Agency (PHA)
- Edward Welsh, Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)

Observers

- Angela Greer, GMC Liaison Adviser

Welcome and Chair's introduction

- 1** The Chair welcomed attendees to the UK Advisory Forum (UKAF). She thanked members for attending the meeting virtually and welcomed members attending for the first time.

Actions from the previous UKAF meeting

- 2** An update on actions from the last meeting on 14 November 2019 was provided. These included:
 - The GMC NI team have engaged directly with doctors in the five NI Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and QUB medical students.
 - We have worked closely with NI stakeholders throughout the pandemic.
 - Revalidation dates for some doctors were moved and we amended our processes to be more flexible for Responsible Officers to recommend doctors for revalidation.
 - We have invited NMC, PSNI and NISCC, to become members of the NI UKAF. RQIA and the GMC are progressing updates to our Memorandum of Understanding

Chief Executive's Update

- 3** The GMC's Chief Executive provided an update on our work during the pandemic. He noted:
 - We granted temporary registration to 40,000 doctors in the UK and brought forward provisional registration for final year medical students.
 - We paused some of our functions, these are now restarting in a safe way.
 - We launched an online GMC Covid-19 Ethical Hub with pandemic-related guidance.
 - We are working with partners to consider impacts on working environments and implications for education and training.
 - Uncertainty about the future of international migration makes retention of the existing workforce increasingly important. We welcome engagement on how deployment of doctors granted temporary registration could be more effective.
 - Regulatory alignment continues to be a priority and how we better share intelligence and data.
 - Legislative reform is imminent, giving us more autonomy and enabling us to modernise our processes. Our new Corporate Strategy will include themes of creating safe working environments, sustainable medical workforce, making every interaction matter, and investing in our staff.

Covid-19 recovery, and opportunities to promote professionalism and wellbeing

- 4** Vivian McConvey, Chief Executive, PCC provided members with an overview of the PCC's response to the pandemic, the impact on patients, and lessons learned. In her presentation she noted:
 - In March 2020 the PCC established a Covid-19 dedicated phone line, which received over 4,000 calls from patients and members of the public with queries and concerns.
 - PCC research demonstrated that patients experienced significant negative impacts whilst shielding. Issues identified included feelings of isolation, negative impacts on mental health and disruption to medical care.
 - On rebuilding the HSC service, Vivian emphasised the importance of listening to the views of patients. She challenged the system to proactively reach out to patients, rather than patients needing to reach out to seek care and support.

- 5** Una Lane, Director of Registration and Revalidation, GMC, updated members on changes to revalidation, supporting international medical graduates and bringing physician associates and anaesthesia associates into regulation. Members noted that the GMC continues to engage with the Department of Health and Social Care (England) and the Medical Council of Ireland in relation to the UK's EU Exit.

- 6** The GMC wish to assure members that we are considering the impact of the pandemic on patients. We will consider PCC's findings as we renew our Patient & Public Involvement strategy and invite partners across the UK to a patient roundtable in November.

- 7** Work is underway in NI to progress our Supporting a Profession Under Pressure (SaPUP) work programme, including:
 - Collaborating with the Department of Health NI (DoH (NI))'s Improving Junior Doctors and Dentists Working Lives group wellbeing issues.
 - Meeting with the HSC Leadership Centre to discuss how we can support their medical leadership work.
 - Our commitment to SaPUP was discussed at a recent HSC Medical Leaders Forum.
 - We are raising awareness of the SaPUP recommendations in all our interactions with the profession.

- 8** The GMC is keen to understand members' priorities and identify areas where we can work together to improve the working environments and wellbeing of doctors.

- 9** The Chair facilitated a wide-ranging discussion, themes raised included:
 - **Impact of the pandemic on patients:** Members noted the challenging findings of PCC's research into patients' experiences of the pandemic. There was

agreement of the need to seek the views of patients about changes made as a result of the pandemic and future decisions about rebuilding services.

- **Workforce pressures:** Members noted examples of doctors and other health and social care professionals experiencing burn out, citing significant pressures which predate the pandemic, but that have increased in the last six months. Members highlighted the need to ensure supportive workplace environments and promote strong leadership within multi-disciplinary teams.
- **Changes to revalidation:** There was a discussion about changes to revalidation made in response to the pandemic and the GMC's consideration of the pressures Medical Directors are facing, that may impact on their Responsible Officer duties. It was noted that the GMC are very mindful of this and would consider and respond to the issues raised.
- **Disruption to medical education and training:** Members noted the importance of protecting education and training opportunities during the pandemic. It was highlighted that decreased opportunities to access training has created difficulties in progression and will have an impact on reaching workforce targets.

10 The Chair offered thanks to Vivian McConvey for her informative presentation.

11 Commenting on the discussion, the Chair highlighted the importance of sharing best practice, listening to the views of patients, and supporting doctors and other healthcare professionals.

12 Summarising the main themes discussed by the Forum, the Chief Executive highlighted challenges and opportunities:

- The medical workforce is tired and burnt out at the beginning of a further challenging period for the HSC service in NI.
- It is important that revalidation and appraisal are supportive and value-adding activities.
- The legacy of disruption to training during the first wave of the pandemic will have implications for progression and workforce planning.
- Professional regulators recognise the value of effective leadership.
- Retention of the existing health and social care workforce is crucial; this can be enhanced through supportive working environments.
- Opportunities exist for further regulatory alignment between health and social care professional regulators and the systems regulator in NI.

13 The next NI UKAF meeting will take place on 31 March 2020.