

What we can't help with

We know it can be worrying when care goes wrong. While there are some concerns we can't help with another organisation may be able to support you (see page 5 or our [local help pages](#)⁶).

Examples of things we can't help with include:

- providing an explanation of your treatment
- fining a doctor
- making a doctor apologise
- changing the outcome of a local investigation
- making a doctor give you a different treatment.

See page 9 for the actions we can take in response to a concern about a doctor.

Is there a time limit for raising a concern?

There is no time limit for raising a concern. However, it's a good idea to raise your concern as soon as possible after the incident.

If the incident happened more than five years ago, we'll ask you to let us know why you couldn't raise your concern earlier, to help us decide whether we can investigate.

⁶ You can find out more about who you can contact on the local help pages on our website - <http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/information-for-patients/local-help-services>.

Who can help with your concern if we can't?

Often, the best place to start is by talking to the people who were involved with your care or treatment, if you feel comfortable doing so. The hospital, GP practice, or clinic where you received care will have its own complaints procedures.

If this doesn't help, or if you can't raise your concern in this way, there are organisations who can help you.⁷

England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
<p>NHS England https://www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/complaint/complaining-to-nhse/ 0300 311 22 33</p>	<p>Northern Ireland health service https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-complain-or-raise-concerns-about-health-services 028 9536 3893</p>	<p>NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk 0800 22 44 88</p>	<p>NHS Wales https://phw.nhs.wales/use-of-site/complaints/</p>
<p>If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint you can ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to investigate. www.ombudsman.org.uk 0345 015 4033</p>	<p>If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint you can ask the Northern Ireland Ombudsman to investigate. www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk 0800 343 424</p>	<p>If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to investigate. www.spsso.org.uk 0800 377 7330</p>	<p>If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint you can ask the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to investigate. www.ombudsman-wales 0300 790 0203</p>
<p>Healthwatch provides free and confidential guidance to help you make a formal complaint. www.healthwatch.co.uk 03000 683 000</p>	<p>The Patient and Client Council provides you with support relating to questions, concerns, or complaints about health and social care. https://patientclientcouncil.hscni.net 0800 917 0222</p>	<p>The Patient Advice and Support Service provides free and confidential guidance. www.cas.org.uk/pass 0800 917 2127</p>	<p>The Board of Community Health Councils in Wales provides a free support service to help you make a complaint. https://boardchc.nhs.wales/get-help/ 02920 235 558</p>

⁷ You can find out more about who you can contact on the local help pages on our website - <http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/information-for-patients/local-help-services>.

How to raise a concern with us

If your concern is something we can consider, there are several ways you can raise it with us. Choose the way that suits you best and that you feel most comfortable with.

- [Complete our online form](#)⁸ – it's the quickest and easiest way for most people to raise a concern.
- If you would like assistance in raising your concern, call us on 0161 923 6602. An adviser can discuss the options with you.
- Complete the form that accompanies this booklet and send it to General Medical Council, Fitness to Practise, 3 Hardman Street, Manchester, M3 3AW.

There's more about the support we can offer you on the next page.

The information we'll need from you

When you raise a concern, it's important that you send us everything from the list below as early as possible. This information will help us to decide whether we will investigate. We'll need:

- the doctor's name and work address
- the doctor's GMC reference number – you can find this [on the medical register](#)⁹
- an explanation of your concern, including the date(s) when the incident(s) happened
- copies of any supporting information, such as any letters or emails you've sent to the relevant organisation, NHS trusts, or health boards about your concern
- the names and addresses of anyone else who witnessed or was involved in the incident(s).

If we're not able to make a decision using the information you've provided, we'll let you know why. We may ask you for additional information that would help us to consider your concerns further.

8 Access our online form on our website – www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/raise-a-concern.

9 Access the medical register here – www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/the-medical-register#searchTheRegister.

What to expect if you raise a concern with us

It's normal to feel nervous about getting in touch with us, but we're here to support you. Our patient charter sets out our commitments to you.

We'll treat you with dignity and respect.

We'll listen to your concerns and give you enough time to explain your situation. We understand that you may be going through a difficult time and we can arrange confidential support through our [Independent Support Service](#).¹⁰ We will take your concerns seriously.

We'll help you find the best way to raise your concern.

We want to help you raise your concern to the right organisation. Sometimes that's us, but in other cases a different organisation may be better placed to help you. If your concern isn't something we can deal with, we'll try and help you find the right place.

We'll keep you updated.

We'll explain how we will look into your concern and how we'll keep you updated on our progress. We'll let you know if there's a delay and will provide contact details so that you know who to contact for additional information or updates.

We'll communicate in a way that works for you.

We'll adapt our communications to best meet your needs. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to understand the information we give you and the decisions we make. You can speak to us on the telephone, write or send an email. Our [Patient Liaison Service](#)¹¹ offers meetings in person if we decide to open an investigation into your concerns.

We'll handle your information with care.

We'll maintain confidentiality as far as possible. If we believe we need to share your information or details with others outside our organisation to help us handle your concern, we'll let you know and seek your views.

We'll learn from your experience with us.

We may not always be able to provide the outcome or answer you want, but we do want to learn from your experience of raising a concern with us. If we have made a mistake we will say sorry. We'll use your feedback to improve our services.

10 Find out more about our Independent Support Service – <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/more-us/why-choose-us/specialist-services/gmc-and-nmc-independent-support/>.

11 Patient Liaison Service – <http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/supporting-you-with-your-concern/patient-liaison-service>.

What happens when you contact us with a concern?

When we receive your concern, we'll review it carefully to see if it's something we need to investigate.

We appreciate that raising a concern may be stressful, so we'll look into it as quickly as we can and aim to be in touch within two weeks. The more relevant information you provide, the more quickly we will be able to consider your concern.

See page 6 for the list of information that will help us consider your concern.

On some occasions we may need to inform the doctor and their employer about your concern. This is so we can find out more information and understand if any steps have been taken to address it already. But, we'll talk to you first before we do this and keep you informed throughout the process.

Once we've finished looking into your concern, we'll invite you to a meeting to talk with you about the outcome.

What support is available to you?

We know from talking to people who have raised a concern that it can be a daunting experience. If you need support while we look into your concern, there are organisations that can help you.

This includes [the Independent Support Service](#)¹² – a free, confidential helpline for patients, witnesses and family members who have raised a concern with us.

For other support services available in your area, see page 5 or our [local help pages](#).¹³

If we decide not to investigate your concern

If we decide not to investigate, we'll let you know and we'll explain our reasons. We may show the doctor a copy of your concern so they can use it to learn. We'll only do this if you're comfortable sharing the information.

See page 9 to find out what will happen if we decide to investigate your concern.

12 Find out more about the Independent Support Service – www.victimsupport.org.uk/more-us/why-choose-us/specialist-services/gmc-and-nmc-independent-support/.

13 Find out more about other support services that can help you on our website – www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/information-for-patients/local-help-services.

What happens if we investigate your concern?

While we're investigating your concern, we'll keep you up to date with what we're doing. On most occasions, a member of our Patient Liaison Service will meet with you at the beginning of the investigation to discuss what will happen next and answer any questions.

Your Investigation officer will also be on hand throughout the process, and will be in touch every three weeks to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation.

If we think that the doctor you've raised a concern about may continue to pose a risk to patients or the public while we investigate, we can ask the [Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service \(MPTS\)](#)¹⁴ to temporarily limit or suspend the doctor's practice.

What happens when we've finished our investigation?

Once our investigation is complete, we'll do one of the following:

- **decide no further action is required** – in some cases, we'll decide we don't need to take any action against a doctor. This will only happen when we feel the doctor has made a great effort to make sure they won't make the mistake again and that they don't pose a risk to patient safety.
- **issue a warning to the doctor** – this is when we agree that a doctor's behaviour or actions fall below the standard we expect of them, but restricting their practice isn't necessary.
- **agree undertakings** – in this case, we'll ask the doctor to sign up to an agreement to improve the way they work. This may include carrying out specific training or working under supervision.
- **refer them to a tribunal** – we can ask the MPTS to carry out a hearing to decide whether to restrict or remove a doctor's right to practise in the UK.

Whatever the outcome, we'll always let you know about decision and offer you the chance to talk through next steps or to ask any questions you may have.

14 Find out more about the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) on its website – <https://www.mpts-uk.org/>.

Email: gmc@gmc-uk.org

Website: gmc-uk.org

Telephone: 0161 923 6602

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