General Medical Council

Licensing and fitness to practise

1 On 16 November 2009, we introduced licensing for doctors for the first time. All doctors who wish to practise medicine in the UK now, by law, need to hold both registration and a licence to practise. It is the licence to practise, rather than registration, that gives a doctor the legal authority to undertake activities related to the practice of medicine, such as prescribing medicine. This is the first step towards the introduction of revalidation, whereby doctors will need to periodically renew their licence by demonstrating that they are up to date and fit to practise.

2 Every registered doctor is entitled to a licence. If a doctor does not require a licence for their employment they can choose to remain on the register without a licence although they will not be able to undertake any of the activities related to the practice of medicine for which a licence is required.

3 The GMC's fitness to practise sanctions continue to attach to a doctor's registration. Where a doctor is referred to the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) for a hearing and their registration is suspended or erased by a medical practitioners tribunal, we will automatically withdraw a doctor's licence.

4 Where a doctor's registration is subject to conditions or undertakings which restrict their practice, they will still be entitled to hold a licence but must continue to comply with any conditions or undertakings imposed on their registration. If they do not, their licence and registration will be at risk.

5 Warnings do not restrict a doctor's registration or right to practise and will not prevent a doctor from getting or maintaining a licence.

6 We will continue to investigate or take action under our procedures against doctors who hold registration without a licence. This includes requiring such doctors to undergo a performance, health or language assessment. It also means any sanctions, including conditions can be imposed on a doctor's registration regardless of whether they hold a licence.

7 Doctors being investigated under our fitness to practise procedures will be entitled to hold a licence provided their registration has not been suspended or erased. We will continue to refer doctors to the MPTS for an interim orders tribunal in appropriate cases regardless of whether they have a licence to practise. If a doctor's name is suspended from the Register by an MPTS interim orders tribunal, they will not be entitled to hold a licence during the period of suspension.

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

8 If a doctor has conditions placed on their registration by an MPTS interim orders tribunal, they will still be entitled to hold a licence, although they would need to comply with any conditions on their registration.

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