



Raising Concerns about Patient Safety

Practice Management

GMC Guidance March 2012

Two GMC guidance documents on raising concerns about patient safety and on professional leadership which applies to all practising doctors came into effect March 2012. Within the core GMC 'Good Medical Practice' it is clear (Para 43) that colleagues have a responsibility to protect patients who may be affected by a professional colleague's "conduct, performance, and health". Doctors also have a responsibility (Para 6) to raise concerns if they feel patient safety is being compromised, for example, by inadequate premises, resources, or policies.

This includes doctors who have a management role within practices, or on CCGs and Area Teams who also have a responsibility to ensure that reporting processes are in place and that any such concerns are appropriately investigated.

This GMC guidance expands the advice within GMC 'Good Medical Practice' and this may cause conflicts. Doctors may feel reluctant to raise concerns for fear of damaging working relationships, because of a sense that nothing will be done, or that doing so will have a damaging effect on careers. It is important to establish the facts, and if you have a reasonable concern this should be raised.

These approaches may help doctors in general practice.

- Your practice needs a transparent process for identifying significant or adverse incidents which could affect patient care. It is preferable that concerns are discussed openly and at an early stage and in a group with wide membership. This ensures that problems can be more effectively tackled and any lessons learnt are known collectively.
- Patient complaints should identify possible patient safety issues and these should be included in the above process.
- The results of any investigations should be openly available and discussed.
- You should introduce an audit process to ensure identified and agreed changes to practice systems and processes as a result of identified patient safety issues are acted upon.

GPs who have concerns about a colleague should ideally discuss this within the practice. If this is difficult to do or has been tried without success then it is appropriate to consider getting further advice; this may be from

- Your MDO
- The BMA, LMC or
- The Medical Director of NHS England Area Team

The LMC can offer both advice and support. Both the LMC Chief Executive and Medical Secretary can advise on any issue according to the principles of GMC 'Good Medical Practice'.

If your concerns represent a substantial risk to patient safety, they may need to be reported, most straightforwardly to the Area Team's Medical Director although the LMC can initially act on your behalf. It may well be helpful to discuss your concerns with an LMC Officer as this can put them into context and perspective, and introduce an element of objectivity. You may not be best placed to decide on the next best step as you are likely to be affected by it.

Other concerns may be tackled differently, and the LMC can offer advice and support to both the practitioner involved and other members of the practice. The LMC can also signpost support from other organisations, including the Deanery for GPs in training posts.

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