

GP special measures - Questions & Answers

What is “different” about ‘special measures’? Why is this being introduced now?

From October, the CQC will start to rate GP practices in England on a four point scale: outstanding, good, requires improvement, inadequate. A rating of inadequate will be an unambiguous signal that improvements are needed.

Placing a practice into ‘special measures’ will be a clear sign that a practice needs to improve. The CQC will work with NHS England to introduce an approach that ensures that practices are not able to continue to provide inadequate care indefinitely: the approach will ensure that practices work quickly to improve the quality of care they provide.

Why will a practice be placed into ‘special measures’?

The CQC want to discuss the criteria for being placed into ‘special measures’ with GP practices and the organisations that represent them. They have set out their proposals today and will seek feedback on these over the next few weeks.

The CQC’s proposals are that where aspects of a service are rated ‘inadequate’, practices will have six months to improve. If they fail to improve they will be put into ‘special measures’ and if, after a maximum of a further six months they are still found to be inadequate, they will have their registration with the CQC cancelled and/ or their contract terminated by NHS England.

In some cases, a GP practice will have such significant problems that patients are at risk, or there will be sufficiently little confidence in the practice’s capacity to improve on its own, that the practice will be placed straight into ‘special measures’.

When will ‘special measures’ be introduced for NHS GP practices?

From October 2014, when the CQC begins rating practices, it will begin to introduce a shadow ‘special measures’ framework; this means the CQC will be testing its approach to ‘special measures’, while working with the sector and NHS England to ensure that this is effective and appropriate.

What role will local CCGs play?

CCGs will work closely with the Area Team and with practices to support the development of improvement plans for practices rated as inadequate or placed in special measures.

What if a practice does not improve following ‘special measures’?

The CQC will inspect the practice at the end of the ‘special measures’ period. If the practice has not improved, and continues to provide inadequate care, it is likely that the CQC will cancel the provider’s registration.

Exit from special measures is therefore for CQC to decide. It has been decided that formal termination of the contract by NHS England will not be required under these circumstances, as the conditions of the contract would be sufficiently frustrated without CQC registration for it to no longer be valid.

What will NHS England do if a provider’s registration is cancelled?

This does not necessarily mean that the practice will close: it means that the existing provider can no longer provide the services at that practice. NHS England’s area team, as the commissioner of primary care, will choose the most appropriate option for that specific practice. This may be by sourcing a new GP provider or by enabling patients to move to other local providers, and will be based on local factors.

Regardless of which option is chosen, NHS England will ensure that all of the patients registered at the practice are able to access local and high-quality GP services. NHS England will also work with the

CQC and local providers to ensure there is clear information to the public about the process and its implications for patients.

Can patients choose to leave their current GP practice if it is rated 'inadequate', or placed in 'special measures'?

Patients are free to register with any GP practice they wish, if the practice has capacity. Individual practices can advise new patients on their registration requirements.

NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk - has details of all GP surgeries in England and there is an option to search by postcode. As well as finding the nearest practice, there is lots of information to help patients choose. This includes how many GPs there are at surgeries, their opening hours, what services they offer, and also how they've performed in inspections and what their patients think of them.

What do people need to do to make a complaint about their GP practice, if they have concerns?

NHS England is committed to ensuring that all patients receive good quality care from their GPs. However, if patients are not happy with their GP practice, they can put their complaint in writing to: NHS England, PO Box 16738, Redditch, Worcestershire B97 9PT or e-mail england.contactus@nhs.net or call free phone number: 0300 311 22 33.

Of the 8,000 NHS GP practices, how many does NHS England expect to be placed in 'special measures' from October?

We have no way of knowing as all GP practices are different and serve different populations across different areas. But the overall standard of general practice in the NHS is high and, from discussions with the CQC, we expect a very small number to be placed into 'special measures'.

But hasn't the CQC carried out a number of pilot studies? Surely these will indicate a pro rata failure figure when GP practices are considered across the country as a whole?

The numbers will depend on a number of factors, including how and when the CQC target and schedule its visits.

Early indications from the pilots suggest only a small number of practices will be rated as 'inadequate' and an even smaller number being placed into 'special measures' where there are serious patient safety issues. In these instances, we fully expect area teams to have identified and be working closely with the practice already to address these problems.

Why is NHS England not already aware of those practices that do not meet the standard required? Why the reliance on external inspection?

NHS England's area teams will all have robust arrangements in place to monitor the safety and quality of the services provided by GPs in their area. Each area team will have programme of visiting for all GP practices in their area, and also for practices where there are more specific concerns.

Information about GP practices is also formally shared between other NHS partners, such as clinical commissioning groups. An important way ensure that high standards are being met includes listening to patient feedback, for example clinicians reviewing complaints and analysis of information that is in the public domain, for example on NHS Choices. Performance can also be monitored closely through formal primary care contracting arrangements.

What is the average patient list for an NHS GP practice – and if GP practices have their contracts cancelled what total number of patients across the country could be displaced?

There is significant variation in the number of people listed with an NHS GP Practice. NHS England will work with nearby practices to ensure that patients registered with a practice whose contract is cancelled can continue to access GP services locally.

