



Welcome to medicine 2015

What is expected of you as a future doctor?

Working with doctors Working for patients

General
Medical
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Welcome to medicine

You are at the start of a journey – one that is a huge privilege but also carries huge responsibility.

Your time in medical school will prepare you for the wide world of medicine and this time can be both exciting and daunting. As a doctor, complete strangers will trust you with their most intimate concerns and you will change lives.

Survey after survey shows that the public trusts doctors more than any other group. This is a reputation that we must cherish and which we must continue to earn by our determination to practise with those values that have been the hallmark of our profession down the ages: high standards, integrity, a clear sense of duty, respect for others, acknowledging the limits of our competence and, above all, recognising that we accept personal responsibility for all that we do.

As a medical student, you will need to juggle the challenges of clinical, academic, practical and ethical learning, while at the same time enjoying all the social aspects of being at university.

In many respects, particularly in your early years, you will be like other students. But in some important ways you are different because you can learn only by coming into close contact with patients and their relatives. I have always subscribed in my own teaching of medical students to William

Osler's view that 'to study medicine without books is to sail an uncharted sea', but 'to study medicine only from books is not to go to sea at all'.

The patients and relatives you meet will themselves often be sailing on a stormy sea – distressed and vulnerable. All of this can at times be very stressful for you, so you will need to learn early on how to develop emotional resilience to deal with that by finding coping strategies and support that works for you. If you find that you are not coping with stress, you should look to your tutor and your university's mentoring scheme, student health service and pastoral care, sooner rather than later. The healthier you are, the better the doctor you will be and the more equipped you will be to support and care for your patients.

This booklet sets out what is expected of you as a future doctor and gives you some practical advice for getting the most out of your time at medical school. I hope you enjoy your time as a medical student as much as I did and I wish you well.

Professor Terence Stephenson

Chair of the General Medical Council

What is the General Medical Council?

The General Medical Council (GMC) protects, promotes and maintains the health and safety of the public by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine. This means we make sure that doctors have the right knowledge, skills and experience to practise medicine safely in the UK.

Fostering good medical practice

We do this by producing ethical guidance that sets out the principles you should follow in your work – the duties of a doctor. *Good medical practice* is our core guidance, but we also give advice on issues such as reporting gunshot and knife wounds, personal beliefs and medical practice, appropriate use of social media and obtaining consent to treatment from children. You can access the full range of guidance on our website: www.gmc-uk.org/guidance.

Promoting high standards of medical education and training

We set the standards for the education that medical schools provide. To see these standards, go to www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards.asp.

We also set the knowledge, skills and behaviour that you must demonstrate by the time you graduate. You may want to have a look to see the types of things you will be able to do when you finish medical school, including the practical procedures you will be able to carry out. You can read these at www.gmc-uk.org/undergrad_outcomes.

Keeping up-to-date registers of qualified doctors

We control access to the medical register. You will need to register with us and obtain a licence to practise before you are able to begin work as a doctor. We will only register those doctors who meet our standards, so it is important that you understand how your behaviour, even now as a student, is expected to reflect these.

Dealing firmly and fairly with fitness to practise concerns

We have strong and effective legal powers designed to maintain the standards the public have a right to expect of doctors and we take firm but fair action where those standards have not been met. Where any doctor fails to meet those standards, we act to protect patients from harm – if necessary, by removing or suspending a doctor from the medical register or placing restrictions on their practice.

Professionalism in action

You can find out more about what professionalism is and why it matters on pages 12–13 of this booklet. We have also produced a dedicated website to help you understand what professionalism in action means for you as a student: www.gmc-uk.org/studentvalues.

Life at medical school: finding the right balance

Making the most of your time at medical school

- **Don't be distracted by how well others are doing.** Medicine is a competitive subject to study. Your fellow students will be some of the brightest in the country so you may find it's not as easy to stay ahead as it was at school.

Try not to worry about how your performance compares with your peers. Instead, focus on doing the best you can. Remember also that a fundamental part of being a good doctor is the ability to work in a team and willingness to reflect on your own practice.

- **Work hard, but don't overdo it.** One of the ways to do well is by putting the hours in on your studies. But make sure you're in a position to get the most out of your efforts. Don't work all day every day; if you try to do too much you may burn out, so make sure you get enough sleep. Exercising and eating well will help you concentrate. Both will also help to keep you healthy.
- **Take time out to enjoy yourself.** It's important that you find a way to deal with stress that works for you and to develop an effective support system. Taking time to make friends who you can unwind with, or talk to when you're finding things difficult, is important. Having interests outside of your study can also help. In addition, they can help to make your CV stand out in the future.
- **Make sure you know where to find help should you need it.** Your medical school wants you to succeed on your course, so it will provide

different services to support you. You should familiarise yourself with these services, so you know where to get help if you need it. You should also make sure you register with a GP who is local to your medical school.

NHS Choices has produced a range of information about student health, covering issues including stress and mental health, nutrition and sexual health. You can find this at www.nhs.uk/livewell/studenthealth.

We've also worked with the Medical Schools Council to create a guide for medical schools on how best to support medical students with mental health conditions. It also contains a section on mythbusters – common misconceptions that students have about mental health.

The guidance aims to reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions and makes clear that students can be affected by a range of conditions – such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and substance misuse. Any of these can affect your studies, but in almost every case will not prevent you from completing your course and continuing a career in medicine. You can find this guidance at www.gmc-uk.org/mentalhealth.

The guide was just one outcome from our review of health and disability in medical education and training (see www.gmc-uk.org/disabilityreview).

Other outcomes of the review include:

- disabled students sharing their examples of reasonable adjustments at medical school on our website
- statements on disability in medical education and the requirement for disabled students to gain competence in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Have fun, but know where to draw the line

University is an exciting time and it's important that you balance your study with taking time to enjoy yourself. But you must know where to draw the line.

Your studies will suffer if you spend too much time on social activities or have too many late nights. More importantly though, risky behaviour such as heavy drinking or drug use, including legal substances, could seriously affect your health and even your career. Remember: just because something is legal, it doesn't mean it's safe and so-called 'legal highs' can be extremely dangerous.

Your behaviour, even as a student, reflects on the medical profession as a whole. We will not register medical graduates we believe won't be safe to practise medicine or who don't meet our standards for ethical conduct. That means that all your hard work at university could be in vain if you cannot go on to practise medicine at the end of it. Make sure this does not happen to you.

The table on pages 8–9 of this booklet sets out the key areas of concern that medical students get into difficulty with. Another area of increasing importance is the use of social media: be very cautious about what information about yourself, including photographs, you make publicly available or allow to be published.

Find out more about using social media

You can read our explanatory guidance on what is expected from doctors when they are using social media at www.gmc-uk.org/socialmedia.

Key areas of concern relating to students' fitness to practise

Areas of concern	Examples
Persistent inappropriate attitude or behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Uncommitted to work■ Neglecting administrative tasks■ Poor time management■ Non-attendance■ Poor communication skills■ Failure to accept and follow educational advice
Health concerns and poor insight into or management of these concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Failure to seek medical treatment or other support■ Refusal to follow medical advice or care plans, including monitoring and reviews, in relation to maintaining fitness to practise■ Failure to recognise limits and abilities or lack of insight into health concerns■ Treatment-resistant condition
Criminal conviction or caution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Child pornography■ Theft■ Financial fraud■ Possession of illegal substances■ Child abuse or any other abuse■ Physical violence
Drug or alcohol misuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Drunk driving■ Alcohol consumption that affects clinical work or the work environment

Areas of concern	Examples
Drug or alcohol misuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dealing, possessing or misusing drugs, even if there are no legal proceedings
Cheating or plagiarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cheating in examinations, logbooks or portfolios ■ Passing off others' work as your own ■ Forging a supervisor's name on assessments
Unprofessional behaviour or attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Breaching confidentiality ■ Misleading patients about their care or treatment ■ Culpable involvement in a failure to obtain proper consent from a patient ■ Sexual, racial or other forms of harassment ■ Inappropriate examinations or failure to keep appropriate boundaries in behaviour ■ Persistent rudeness to patients, colleagues or others ■ Unlawful discrimination
Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assault ■ Physical violence ■ Bullying ■ Abuse
Dishonesty or fraud, including dishonesty outside the professional role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Falsifying research ■ Financial fraud ■ Fraudulent CVs or other documents ■ Misrepresenting qualifications

What happens if things go wrong?

Everyone makes mistakes and everyone gets ill or finds it hard to cope sometimes. Some issues may be so significant that they are not compatible with you becoming a doctor, but the vast majority can be dealt with.

- **If you're finding it hard to cope for any reason, don't wait to ask for help.** The organisations listed on page 11 are useful sources of support, but your medical school also wants you to do well and will have its own systems in place to support and advise anyone who is struggling, for whatever reason.

They will keep a watchful eye out for any behaviour that could mean your fitness to practise medicine in the future is in question. They will also have local procedures to deal with any such problems and to support you in getting back on track where possible. In the worst case, if your medical school believes you are not suited to becoming a doctor, they may ask you to leave.

- **Be open and honest about problems.** Honesty is one of the fundamental qualities of medical professionalism, so lying about a problem will actually make it worse than admitting it and finding a way to deal with it.

When you come to register with us, you will be asked to declare any past fitness to practise issues openly and honestly. We have a duty to look into all issues declared, but that doesn't mean that we won't then allow you to register as a doctor. We will, though, take the situation far more seriously if you have not told us about an issue and we subsequently find out about it.

- **A note on police cautions.** Be aware that police cautions have a lasting legal status. You should not accept a caution from the police without taking legal advice. Please note that in Scotland a caution is known as a warning.

If you receive a caution, you should discuss this with your medical school. You will also need to declare cautions or convictions that are not protected when you register with us along with other fitness to practise issues. For further information on what you should declare when applying for registration, see our website www.gmc-uk.org/ftpdec.

Sources of support

There are a number of organisations that can support you if you are finding university life difficult.

British Medical Association (BMA)

The BMA has an MSC Welfare Subcommittee committed to improving the welfare of medical students in the UK.

Go to www.bma.org.uk.

Nightline

Nightline is a confidential support service run by students at universities across the UK. Visit their website to find your local support line at www.nightline.ac.uk.

Samaritans

Samaritans provide confidential emotional support 24 hours a day.

Find out more at www.samaritans.org.uk.

Joining a profession

What is medical professionalism and why does it matter?

Medical professionalism refers to the behaviours that are expected of doctors in order to maintain the high level of trust society has in them.

The trust between a patient and their doctor is vital. If your patient does not fully trust you, they may not feel comfortable talking to you openly and honestly about such a sensitive and personal issue as their health.

Certain behaviours, even by a single doctor, have the potential to undermine trust in the ability of the profession to provide safe, effective care as a whole. Some of those behaviours, such as rape, murder or drug abuse, are obvious. But others, such as how you conduct your private life or judge when it is appropriate to disclose confidential information, are far more subtle.

Our ethical guidance sets out the high-level principles of appropriate conduct for doctors, including future doctors. It covers a wide range of issues, such as raising concerns about patient safety and assessing patients' capacity to consent to treatment. We update all our guidance regularly and each part is based on years of research into what makes a good doctor, including extensive consultation with both doctors and patients.

Understanding and applying these principles won't mean you never face a difficult decision, but they can help you to make the right choices.

At the start of our core guidance, *Good medical practice*, we've summarised these principles – we expect all doctors registered with us to meet the duties set out in the following four domains.

Knowledge, skills and performance

- Make the care of your patient your first concern.
- Provide a good standard of practice and care.
 - Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date.
 - Recognise and work within the limits of your competence.

Safety and quality

- Take prompt action if you think that patient safety, dignity or comfort is being compromised.
- Protect and promote the health of patients and the public.

Communication, partnership and teamwork

- Treat patients as individuals and respect their dignity.
 - Treat patients politely and considerately.
 - Respect patients' right to confidentiality.
- Work in partnership with patients.
 - Listen to, and respond to, their concerns and preferences.
 - Give patients the information they want or need in a way they can understand.
 - Respect patients' right to reach decisions with you about their treatment and care.
 - Support patients in caring for themselves to improve and maintain their health.
- Work with colleagues in the ways that best serve patients' interests.

Maintaining trust

- Be honest and open and act with integrity.
- Never discriminate unfairly against patients or colleagues.
- Never abuse your patients' trust in you or the public's trust in the profession.

Useful resources for you

GMC news for students

GMC news for students is our e-bulletin for medical students. Whatever stage you are at in your medical education, this bulletin will help you keep up to date with our work and the latest learning materials.

It covers a wide range of topical issues – such as how you can use social media in your studies, the challenges students with a disability face, and ways for you to report and act on concerns about patient safety – with views from students and advice from doctors who are eminent in their field.

Around 18,000 students already get *GMC news for students*. You can sign up at www.gmc-uk.org/studentnewssignup.

Information for medical students

We've put all our information designed specifically for students into one handy place. The student section of our website lets you:

- find out about our role in medical education
- sign up to receive *GMC Student News*
- read all our published guidance
- get involved with our consultations
- find out how to apply for provisional registration, which you will need when you start practising as a doctor.

Head to www.gmc-uk.org/students to see all this information for medical students.

Guidance and interactive learning tools

You can find all our guidance on our website at www.gmc-uk.org/guidance. While you're studying at medical school, we think that you'll find the following guidance most useful.

- *Doctors' use of social media*
- *0–18 years: guidance for all doctors*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together*
- *Maintaining a professional boundary between you and your patient*
- *Personal beliefs and medical practice*
- *Protecting children and young people: the responsibilities of all doctors*
- *Raising and acting on concerns about patient safety*
- *Treatment and care towards the end of life: good practice in decision making*

Order our guidance

To order hard copies of our guidance, email publications@gmc-uk.org.

We have also developed a range of interactive learning tools to help you understand how the principles in our guidance apply to clinical practice. For example, in *Good medical practice in action* you can test your understanding of our guidance by choosing from over 60 scenarios highlighting different ethical issues. You can find all our learning materials at www.gmc-uk.org/learningmaterials.

Professionalism in action

We have also produced a dedicated website to help you understand what professionalism in action means for you as a student:

www.gmc-uk.org/studentvalues.

This is based on our guidance *Medical students: professional values and fitness to practise*, which you can read at www.gmc-uk.org/studentftp.

Promoting high standards of medical education and training

You may also want to take a look at our standards for the education that medical schools provide. See www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards.asp.

And you can see the types of things you will be able to do when you finish medical school at www.gmc-uk.org/undergrad_outcomes.

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