Student Fitness to Practise: The Past, Present and Future

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Areas for discussion

- Historical overview of student fitness to practise.
- Guidance on professional behaviour and student fitness to practise.
- Student fitness to practise and the point of registration.
- Ongoing and future work in student fitness to practise.
Regulation of doctors as a profession began in the 19th century. At this time, medical schools began to teach professional ideals in order to identify students as part of a profession.

In 1862, St Bartholomew’s teaching hospital (London) established a Discipline Committee for medical students.

The General Medical Council had a student register from early 1860s until World War II.
Recent developments

- Until 1990s, few medical schools had robust FTP mechanisms to remove students.

- All UK medical schools introduced student fitness to practise procedures by 2001.

- But, procedures at medical schools had to fit within their University statutes and regulations.

- No evidence of consistency in decision-making or procedures within and between schools.
In 2005, the General Medical Council and the Medical Schools Council set up a joint working group:

‘To discuss and determine principles and practical arrangements through which universities and the GMC can confirm the fitness to practise of medical applicants, students and graduates at the point of entry to the provisional register.’
The Student Fitness to Practise Working Group

Work should ensure that:

- Medical schools have effective, fair and consistent procedures for identifying students whose conduct gives serious cause for concern or whose health is affected to such a degree that it could harm the public.

- Medical schools are able to meet their duty to ensure all graduates are fit to practise at the point of registration with the GMC.

- There are mechanisms in place to ensure best practice in effectiveness, fairness and consistency in decision-making is shared.
Medical students: Professional behaviour and fitness to practise

Guidance from the GMC and the MSC
Medical students: professional behaviour and fitness to practise

The Guidance covers:

- The professional behaviour expected of medical students.
- Threshold of acceptable behaviour.
- Areas of misconduct and the sanctions available.
- Key elements in student fitness to practise arrangements.
Purpose of SFTP guidance

- Emphasise professional behaviours expected by students in a positive and engaging light.

- Highlight reality that medical students have privileges and responsibilities different from other students.

- Advise medical schools on making decisions about student conduct (threshold, areas of concern, sanctions).

- Suggest good practice for student fitness to practise arrangements.
Developed for both students and those involved in medical education.

Guidance refers only to conduct and does not advise on health issues.

Guidance is voluntary but the implementation and use will be considered in GMC quality assurance process and graduates must demonstrate to the GMC that their FTP is not impaired.
## Medical school FTP caseload 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminal conviction/caution</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and alcohol misuse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive behaviour</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent inappropriate attitude/behaviour incl attendance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating/plagiarism/irregular assessment conduct</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty/fraud</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprofessional behaviour/attitudes</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor performance/Misconduct</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health (unspecified) and mental health</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed/multiple</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL (based on 18 medical schools)</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Based on QABME annual returns questionnaire 2006/2007 academic year.
Obtaining registration

- The Medical Act 1983 was amended in 2006:
  - All applicants are required to demonstrate to the GMC that their fitness to practise is not impaired prior to provisional registration (in force October 2007).
  - Removes the automatic link between graduation and registration.
- Applicants must complete a self-declaration form on their fitness to practise to the GMC.
Outcome of declarations in 2007

- 5,771 UK graduates were granted immediate registration
- 175 UK graduates made positive declarations
- Of these 175, 143 were subject to further scrutiny.
- Of these 143, 141 were then granted registration.
- In 1 case advice was sought from a GMC Registration Panel before Registration was granted because of new information.
- And in the final case, the medical school rescinded its decision to graduate the student as a consequence of the information which arose from the further scrutiny of the declaration.
‘Both Good Doctors, Safer Patients and The Regulation of the Non-medical Healthcare Professions raised the issue of whether students and trainees should have closer relationships with their future regulators prior to qualification.’
Engagement and consultation

- The GMC Quality Assurance of Basic Medical Education (QABME) annual returns questionnaire 2007/2008 asked medical schools to reflect on how the SFTP guidance was being implemented into local arrangements.

- GMC/MSC held a student fitness to practise engagement workshop on 30 April 2008.

- The GMC/MSC Working Group will further consult in 2008 on a revised draft of the SFTP guidance and a number of options to support work in student fitness to practise.
Next steps in student fitness to practise

- Revising guidance to include advice and clarity on:
  - Health/disability and occupational health
  - Pastoral care/student support
  - Applying the SFTP threshold
  - Structure of fitness to practise arrangements

- Developing possible tools to support consistent decision making such as:
  - A training package for decision-makers on SFTP cases
  - Bank of hypothetical cases
  - Informal network for FTP leads at medical schools
Other developments with student fitness to practise implication:

- GMC student engagement programme.
- Review of *Tomorrow’s Doctors*.
- QABME process.
- GMC/Gateways Guidance – *Advising medical schools: encouraging disabled students.*
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