Your health matters
Practical tips and sources of support

Working with doctors Working for patients
Your health matters

Medicine is a challenging and stressful profession and doctors are at particular risk of certain health problems as a result. This leaflet offers some useful tips and contacts for when you, or your colleagues, are finding it difficult to get the balance right.

Doctors are at increased risk of some health problems – don’t wait to ask for help if you need it

Most doctors are in good health. But the very qualities that make a good doctor, such as empathy and attention to detail, can also make you more vulnerable to stresses and burnout or to turning to drugs or alcohol. Pressures within the healthcare system, such as the often rapid pace of change, can also contribute.

If you are finding it difficult to cope for any reason, please don’t wait to seek support. If, with the right support, you are able to manage a health problem so that the care that you give your patients is not affected, then your fitness to practise won’t be affected.

So there will be no need for us to be involved or even to know about it. For example, if you seek and comply with appropriate treatment and restrict your practice as necessary until you have recovered.

However, if you don’t seek support and the situation worsens, there could be serious, long-term consequences.
If things get worse, there could be serious consequences

A small number of doctors are referred or refer themselves to us each year because of their health and we deal with these as sensitively as we can, including getting expert advice on the situation and dealing with it confidentially.

We are here to protect patients, not to punish doctors. So, wherever possible, we want to support doctors’ recovery and return to safe practice. We have a number of ways that we try to work with doctors with health conditions that are, or may be, affecting their fitness to practise to achieve this.

We have developed a new website to make it as clear as possible what happens when we need to investigate whether a doctor’s fitness to practise medicine is compromised by a health problem. The website sets out what happens and how we protect your confidentiality, who is involved, and includes some real case studies of doctors who have been through the procedures. You can look at this at www.gmc-uk.org/yourhealthmatters.
We understand that having your regulator question your fitness to practise will always be stressful and upsetting, but we hope that making the process as clear as possible will help.

If you think patients might be at risk, you can call us in confidence

We run a confidential, anonymous advice line that you can call Monday to Friday, 9 am–5 pm, for advice on what to do if you have concerns about a doctor. You do not have to tell us your name or the name of the person you are calling about.

You can call us on 0161 923 6602 or email practise@gmc-uk.org.

There are some practical ways you can reduce your risk

- Make sure you are registered with a GP and trust them to give you confidential help.

- Seek help as early as possible when you are unwell and avoid self-diagnosis and self-prescribing for anything but minor ailments.

- Note early warning signs of illness and take them seriously. For example, feeling low or irritable, or having poor concentration and low energy may be signs of burnout.
Avoid 'corridor consultations' with colleagues. If you think you need to consult a doctor then do so in privacy.

Be sensitive to the needs of your colleagues and encourage them to seek help if you are concerned about their health.

Try to maintain a healthy work-life balance. If you develop problems it may help to try sharing with friends, colleagues or family.

If you are worried about your drinking, or someone close to you has raised concerns about it, then the chances are that you are drinking too much. Get help before it gets out of control.

We run a confidential, anonymous advice line that you can call.
Where to go for support

If you need someone to talk to about your health or that of a colleague, the following organisations provide confidential support and advice to doctors in the UK.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Contact Number</th>
<th>Email/Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland</strong></td>
<td>020 7631 1650</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wellbeing@aagbi.org">wellbeing@aagbi.org</a> <a href="http://www.aagbi.org/memberswellbeing.htm">www.aagbi.org/memberswellbeing.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>British Doctors and Dentists Group</strong></td>
<td>07792 819966</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jpsecbdddg@gmx.co.uk">jpsecbdddg@gmx.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.bddg.org">www.bddg.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>British International Doctors’ Association</strong></td>
<td>0161 456 7828</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bida@btconnect.com">bida@btconnect.com</a> <a href="http://www.bidaonline.co.uk">www.bidaonline.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doctors’ Support Network</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@dsn.org.uk">info@dsn.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.dsn.org.uk">www.dsn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mind</strong></td>
<td>0300 123 3393</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@mind.org.uk">info@mind.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">www.mind.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GP Health Service</strong></td>
<td>0300 0303 300</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gp.health@nhs.net">gp.health@nhs.net</a> <a href="http://www.england.nhs.uk/gphealthservice">www.england.nhs.uk/gphealthservice</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practitioner Health Programme</strong></td>
<td>020 3049 4505</td>
<td><a href="http://php.nhs.uk/contact-us">http://php.nhs.uk/contact-us</a> <a href="http://www.php.nhs.uk">www.php.nhs.uk</a></td>
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BMA Counselling and the
Doctor Advisor Service

0330 123 1245
www.bma.org.uk/doctorsfordoctors

Psychiatrists’ Support Service 020 7245 0412
A free, confidential support service for members, trainee members and associates of the Royal College of Psychiatrists who find themselves in difficulty.
Email: phpsychiatristsupportservice@rcpsych.ac.uk

Rethink 0300 5000 927
Offers expert, accredited advice and information – on everything from treatment and care to benefits and employment rights – to everyone affected by mental health problems.
Email: info@rethink.org.uk www.rethink.org

Royal Medical Benevolent Fund 020 8540 9194
Offers support to members of the medical profession and their dependants who are in financial hardship as a result of illness, disability or other unexpected crisis.
Email: help@rmbf.org www.rmbf.org

Royal Medical Foundation 01372 821 010
Supports doctors and their dependants who find themselves in financial hardship.
Email: caseworker@royalmedicalfoundation.org Fax: 01372 821 013
BMA Counselling and the Doctor Advisor Service are completely confidential. They are available to all doctors and medical students, even if they are not members of the BMA.