



# Welcome to medicine

Find out what is expected of you as a future doctor

General  
Medical  
Council

Regulating doctors  
Ensuring good medical practice



# Welcome to medicine

Being a doctor is a huge privilege but carries huge responsibility and your years as a medical student will prepare you for that role. Complete strangers will trust you with their most intimate concerns and you will touch and change lives. Survey after survey shows that the public trusts doctors more than any other group. That 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.

Studying to be a doctor can be both exciting and daunting. 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 who will often be distressed and vulnerable. All of this can at times be very stressful so you will need to learn early on how to deal with that. The healthier you are, the better doctor you will be and the more equipped 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 Sir Peter Rubin, Chair of the General Medical Council

# Contents

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	Page
<b>What is the General Medical Council?</b>	<b>3</b>
Why do you need to know about us?	3
<b>Life at medical school: finding the right balance</b>	<b>4</b>
Making the most of your time at medical school	4
Have fun, but know where to draw the line	6
Most frequent areas of concern relating to student fitness to practise	7
What happens if things go wrong?	9
Cautions	10
Other sources of support	10
<b>Joining a profession</b>	<b>11</b>
What is medical professionalism and why does it matter?	11
Where can you find out more about what is expected of you?	12

# What is the General Medical Council?

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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. That means we make sure that doctors have the right knowledge, skills and experience to practise medicine safely in the UK.

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 from reporting gunshot and knife wounds, personal beliefs and medical practice, and obtaining consent to treatment from children. You can access the full range of guidance on our website:

[www.gmc-uk.org/guidance](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance).

We also set the standards for the education medical schools provide, which are set out in a document called *Tomorrow's Doctors*. You may want to have a look at this 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 the document here:

[www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/tomorrows\\_doctors.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/tomorrows_doctors.asp).

## Why do you need to know about us?

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 we believe meet our standards so it is important that you understand how your behaviour, even now as a student, is expected to reflect these.

You can find out more about what professionalism is and why it matters on page 11 of this booklet.

# Life at medical school: finding the right balance

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## 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 is not so 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 that you can. Remember also that a fundamental part of being a good doctor is the ability and willingness to work in a team.
- **Work hard, but don't overdo it.** One of the ways to do well is obviously 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 are getting enough sleep. Exercising and eating healthily 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 a support system now that you are away from home. Taking time to make friends you can unwind with or talk to when you are 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.** Find out what support your medical school offers so that if you do find at any point you need advice or a listening ear you know where to find it. For example you may have a student welfare officer or a tutor. You should also make sure you register with a GP.

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

## 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 students 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 7–8 of this booklet sets out the most common areas that medical students get into difficulty with. Another area of increasing importance is social networking: be very cautious about what information about yourself, including photographs, you make publicly available or allow to be published.

## Most frequent areas of concern relating to student fitness to practise

Areas of concern	Some examples of concern
<b>Criminal conviction or caution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Child pornography</li><li>■ Theft</li><li>■ Financial fraud</li><li>■ Possession of illegal substances</li><li>■ Child abuse or any other abuse</li><li>■ Physical violence</li></ul>
<b>Drug or alcohol misuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Drunk driving</li><li>■ Alcohol consumption that affects clinical work or the work environment</li><li>■ Dealing, possessing or misusing drugs even if there are no legal proceedings</li></ul>
<b>Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Assault</li><li>■ Physical violence</li><li>■ Bullying</li><li>■ Abuse</li></ul>
<b>Persistent inappropriate attitude or behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Uncommitted to work</li><li>■ Neglect of administrative tasks</li><li>■ Poor time management</li><li>■ Non-attendance</li><li>■ Poor communication skills</li><li>■ Failure to accept and follow educational advice</li></ul>
<b>Cheating or plagiarising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Cheating in examinations, logbooks or portfolios</li><li>■ Passing off others' work as one's own</li><li>■ Forging a supervisor's name on assessments</li></ul>

Areas of concern	Some examples of concern
<b>Dishonesty or fraud, including dishonesty outside the professional role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Falsifying research</li><li>■ Financial fraud</li><li>■ Fraudulent CVs or other documents</li><li>■ Misrepresentation of qualifications</li></ul>
<b>Unprofessional behaviour or attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Breach of confidentiality</li><li>■ Misleading patients about their care or treatment</li><li>■ Culpable involvement in a failure to obtain proper consent from a patient</li><li>■ Sexual, racial or other forms of harassment</li><li>■ Inappropriate examinations or failure to keep appropriate boundaries in behaviour</li><li>■ Persistent rudeness to patients, colleagues or others</li><li>■ Unlawful discrimination</li></ul>
<b>Health concerns and insight or management of these concerns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Failure to seek medical treatment or other support</li><li>■ Refusal to follow medical advice or care plans, including monitoring and reviews, in relation to maintaining fitness to practise</li><li>■ Failure to recognise limits and abilities or lack of insight into health concerns</li><li>■ Treatment-resistant condition.</li></ul>

## 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 are finding it hard to cope for any reason, please don't wait to ask for help.** The organisations listed on page 10 are one source of support, but your medical school also wants you to do well and will have systems in place to support and advise anyone who is struggling, for whatever reason.

They will be keeping 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.** Probity (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 it and we subsequently find out about it.

The next section of this booklet explains why we take your behaviour as a future medical professional so seriously.

### **Cautions**

Cautions have a lasting legal status. You should not accept a caution from the police without taking legal advice. Your medical school will be able to arrange this for you.

### **Other sources of support**

There are a number of organisations who can provide you with support if you are finding university life difficult.

#### *BMA*

The British Medical Association has an MSC Welfare Subcommittee committed to improving the welfare of medical students in the UK. Find out more at:

[www.bma.org.uk](http://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:

[www.nightline.ac.uk](http://www.nightline.ac.uk)

#### *The Samaritans*

The Samaritans provide confidential emotional support 24 hours a day by telephone, email, letter and face to face in their branches. Visit their website to find out more:

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

# Joining a profession

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## 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 judging 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. They cover everything from reporting gunshot and knife wounds, personal beliefs and medical practice, and obtaining consent to treatment from children. We update all of our guidance regularly and each 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 ones.

## Where can you find out more about what is expected of you?

You can find all of our ethical guidance, and a number of interactive resources to help you understand how the principles they contain apply to clinical practice, on our website:

[www.gmc-uk.org/guidance](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance)

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

[www.gmc-uk.org/studentvalues](http://www.gmc-uk.org/studentvalues)

You can keep up to date on any new resources, the publication of new guidance or ways to get involved in helping shape our work by signing up to receive our student e-bulletin:

[www.gmc-uk.org/studentebulletin](http://www.gmc-uk.org/studentebulletin)



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