

Regular checks for all UK doctors

Every doctor practising in the UK will be subject to regular checks to help improve the quality of patient care, it was announced today by the Secretary of State for Health.

The new system of checks - known as revalidation - will be run by the General Medical Council (GMC) and marks the biggest change in how doctors are regulated for more than 150 years.

It promises to be the most comprehensive scheme of its kind anywhere in the world with the UK's 230,000 licensed doctors expected to show they are keeping up to date and are fit to practise.

The Secretary of State for Health, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, today confirmed that the new system will start in December.

He said: 'Doctors save lives every day and making sure they are up to speed with the latest treatments and technologies will help them save even more. This is why a proper system of revalidation is so important.'

The new system will be based on an annual appraisal and the information doctors will collect about their practice, including feedback from patients, doctors, nurses and other colleagues.

The UK will be the first country to introduce such a system covering all its doctors. To keep their licence to practise, doctors will be required to revalidate on a regular basis. Once the scheme is up and running this will normally be every five years.

The GMC will start to tell doctors their first revalidation dates in December and expects most doctors to have revalidated by March 2016.

Professor Sir Peter Rubin, Chair of the GMC welcomed the Health Secretary's decision.

He said: 'This is an historic day for patients and for the medical profession. We are confident that the introduction of revalidation will make a major contribution to the quality of care that patients receive and will give them valuable assurance that the doctors who treat them are regularly assessed against our professional standards.'

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Revalidation is expected to start in early December 2012. Based on plans developed by the four UK countries, we expect to revalidate:

- responsible officers and other medical leaders first, by March 2013
- about a fifth of licensed doctors between April 2013 and the end of March 2014
- the majority of licensed doctors by the end of March 2016
 - all remaining licensed doctors by the end of March 2018.

Since April, the GMC has been working with doctors to understand their connections with 'designated bodies'. These are the organisations that have a duty to provide doctors with a regular appraisal and help them with revalidation. They include NHS organisations, independent healthcare providers, and locum agencies.

As a result of our 'make your connection' campaign we know the designated bodies for nearly 200,000 licensed doctors on the register. We are developing alternative arrangements for doctors who don't have a designated body and will contact them later in the year with more advice.

Over the summer we have also been working with Responsible Officers to schedule doctors for their first revalidation from December 2012 onwards. Responsible Officers have based their schedules on when they expect each of their doctors will be ready for revalidation. We will start to tell doctors their dates from December onwards.

Recent assessments by the Delivery Boards in each of the four countries of the UK - who are responsible for overseeing the changes to relevant legislation and regulations - demonstrate that the health systems are ready enough to commence and organisations across the UK are strengthening their systems of appraisal and clinical governance in readiness for revalidation.

Readiness statistics for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are as follows:

England:

- Registered and licensed doctors 2011: 177,659
- Over 90% of doctors are connected to designated bodies that are ready or very close to being ready for revalidation. (A 'designated body' is a UK organisation which will provide a doctor with a regular appraisal and help them with revalidation)
- The percentage of doctors linked to designated bodies who have had an annual appraisal rose from 63% in March 2011 to 73% in March 2012.

Northern Ireland:

- Registered and licensed doctors 2011: 6,454
- In NI primary care, 99.7% of those eligible for appraisal were appraised last year.
- Consultant appraisal ranges from 72% to 89% across the five Health and Social Care Trusts. Staff and associate specialist appraisal rates range from 32% to 78% across the same organisations.

Scotland:

- Registered and licensed doctors 2011: 19,373
- Excluding NES (NHS Education for Scotland) who cover trainees, 16 of the 19 Boards are considered to be fully on track to deliver revalidation.
- All appraisers in primary care have been NES trained. Appraiser training in secondary care is progressing and will continue until the end of 2013. To date, 345 have completed their training, and a further 180 are scheduled to do so this year. This will ensure sufficient appraisers are trained and in place for the first year.

Wales:

- Registered and licensed doctors 2011: 10,400
 - The GMC will be hosting events, in partnership with the Wales Deanery and Health Boards, to inform doctors about the implementation of Revalidation
 - 87% of GPs have completed appraisals during 2011-12 and 91% of trainees have been engaged in the annual review process for doctors in training
 - 99% of doctors are covered by a designated body that has appointed or nominated a Responsible Officer.

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