

Dear colleague,

The way in which doctors will be regulated is about to change. The GMC will introduce the licence to practise in the autumn of 2009.

It will be the licence, rather than registration, that will signify to patients that a doctor has the legal authority to practise medicine in the UK. Only licensed doctors will be able to exercise the legal privileges currently reserved for registered medical practitioners, such as those relating to prescribing and signing death certificates.

The licence to practise will be the first step towards the introduction of revalidation. This new approach to medical regulation will give patients and employers regular assurance that their doctors are up to date and fit to practise.

These are significant changes affecting the medical profession. It is important that you understand them. This leaflet aims to explain what the introduction of the licence will mean for you.



Sir Graeme Catto
President, General Medical Council
November 2008



Further information

The GMC website (www.gmc-uk.org) has more information about licensing and revalidation, including answers to frequently asked questions.

If you have a question about licensing which is not answered by the information available on our website, please email licensing@gmc-uk.org.

Tel: 0161 923 6402

Email: licensing@gmc-uk.org

Website: www.gmc-uk.org

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Regulating doctors
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The Licence to Practise

Licensing and you:
*Information for
registered doctors*

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A licence or not?

When we introduce the licence to practise, the medical register will show whether a doctor is a licensed medical practitioner or holds registration only.

A doctor wanting to practise medicine in the UK must be a licensed medical practitioner; this means they must hold both registration and a licence to practise with the GMC. A doctor wanting to practise overseas will not need to hold a licence for the period that they are out of the UK.

Licences will require periodic renewal by revalidation. When revalidation begins, licensed doctors will be required to demonstrate to the GMC that they are practising in accordance with the generic standards of practice set by the GMC (as described in *Good Medical Practice*). Licensed doctors on the Specialist or GP Register will, in addition, be required to recertify against the standards that apply to their specialty or area of practice, set by the relevant medical Royal College or Faculty and approved by the GMC.

Before the licence is introduced you will need to decide whether or not you require a licence to practise. If you do not need a licence, the alternatives will be for you to hold registration only or to relinquish your registration by removing your name from the register.

You will have one of three options:

Option A

- you may hold registration with a licence to practise

Option B

- you may hold registration only

Option C

- you may relinquish your registration.

Will I need a licence?

You will need a licence to practise if you want to:

- hold a position as a doctor in the NHS or independent sector, on a permanent or locum basis
- write prescriptions, sign death certificates or exercise any of the other legal privileges currently reserved for registered medical practitioners

Or

- if your employer, those who contract your services or another party require you to hold a licence.

You may choose to hold a licence if you:

- Use your professional knowledge and skills or rely on your professional standing to carry out your role. There will be no legal requirement to hold a licence for activities such as teaching, medical management, medical journalism, medico-legal work and some types of research. Nevertheless, holding a licence will demonstrate that you are up to date and fit to practise.



What is registration only?

If you do not need a licence, but wish to remain registered after the licence has been introduced, you may hold registration only. This will provide you with formal recognition of your good standing with the GMC.

If you hold registration only, you will have no licence to renew by periodic revalidation.

The lack of a licence will not prevent you from providing assistance in emergencies or undertaking any other activities, for which, in the future, a licence will not be required.

You will be able to undertake activities not legally dependent on a doctor holding a licence; this means for example you will be able to sign passport photographs and use the title 'Doctor', although you should make it clear that you are not a licensed medical practitioner.

Remember: if you wish to exercise the legal privileges, including those relating to prescribing, that are currently reserved for registered medical practitioners, you will need to hold a licence to practise.

What do I need to do?

For the moment there is nothing you need to do to obtain a licence. You should, however, start to consider which option will best suit your needs and requirements.

We will write to you again in early 2009 to send you more information about the three options described in this leaflet. At that time we will ask you to make a decision about your future registration status.