Q&A: Returning to UK practice

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QUESTION

If I have relinquished my licence, what would I need to do to start practising in the UK again?

You would need to re-activate your licence with the GMC. More information about this process can be found here http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/registration_applications/restoration.asp. You would then need to establish a connection with a UK designated body and (if working in the NHS) gain entry onto a performers list. Your primary care organisation may indicate the need for you to participate in a period of induction, support or supervision in order to be re-entered onto the performers list. (See http://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/primary-care-comm/gp-action-plan/gp-induction/)

SCENARIOS

I have been working as a Surgeon in Kenya for the last 25 years. I now hope to come to London to work as a private GP. Will I need to register with the Royal College of General Practitioners?

Doctors need to be registered with the General Medical Council (not the Royal College of General Practitioners) and hold a licence to practise if they want to work as a General Practitioner in the National Health Service or work in UK private practice.

Both registration and a licence to practise are required in order to prescribe prescription-only medicines or sign certificates required for statutory purposes (death certificates etc). The General Medical Council’s complete list of the legal privileges and duties of doctors with registration and a licence to practise is available at:

http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/information_for_doctors/privileges.asp

We recommend that you contact the General Medical Council to discuss your specific circumstances via: http://www.gmc-uk.org
Since completing General Practice vocational training in 1992, I have been working in Canada. I now intend to return to a full-time salaried GP post in the UK. Will I need a licence to practise, or will my Canadian licence be transferrable?

To practise medicine in the UK all doctors are required, by law, to be both registered and hold a licence to practise. This applies whether doctors practise full-time, part-time, as a locum, privately or in the NHS, or whether they are employed or self-employed.

The licence to practise gives a doctor the legal authority to undertake certain activities that the law restricts to doctors registered with a licence to practise (e.g. prescribing and signing statutory certificates). Licences to practise are generic and do not restrict doctors to work in a particular specialty or field of practice.

We recommend that you contact the General Medical Council to discuss your specific circumstances, but more information is available:

http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/licensing.asp

After training as a GP in the UK, I have spent the last 14 years working for the WHO in Geneva. Having decided upon a change in career direction, I am soon to become a Departmental Manager for a large Pharmaceutical company based in the UK. Will I need a licence to practise?

The law requires any doctor who treats patients to be registered with the GMC with a licence to practise. While doctors can work in many different environments, only those who are registered with a licence to practise can, for example: work as a doctor in the NHS or in private practice; write prescriptions; or sign death and cremation certificates.

Doctors do not have to have a licence to practise if they do not treat patients. Examples include doctors only working as: lecturers in medical schools; medical managers; or those working exclusively outside the UK.

Organisations, such as the NHS and other healthcare providers, are required to ensure that the doctors they employ have a licence to practise if their work requires them to do so. Hence, we recommend that you contact the Pharmaceutical company that you are about to join to see if they require you to be licensed.

We also recommend that you contact the General Medical Council to discuss your specific circumstances, but more information is available at:

http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/licensing.asp
When I retired from full-time practice last year, I retained my GMC registration, but relinquished by licence to practise. I have now been offered a part-time teaching role within my local Medical School. What does my registration without a licence allow me to do?

Remaining registered without a licence may suit doctors if they are not practising medicine but nevertheless want to retain GMC registration. Doctors do not have to have a licence to practise if they do not treat patients. Examples include doctors only working as: lecturers in medical schools; medical managers; or those working exclusively outside the UK.

Organisations, such as the NHS and other healthcare providers, are required to ensure that the doctors they employ have a licence to practise if their work requires them to do so. Hence, we recommend that you contact the Medical School to see whether they require you to be licensed.

Holding registration without a licence allows doctors to show to employers, overseas regulators and others that they remain in good standing with the GMC. It remains a doctor’s responsibility to be familiar with Good Medical Practice and to follow the guidance it contains.

Doctors can, of course, undertake activities not legally dependent on holding a licence. For example, they can continue to sign passport photographs and use the title ‘Doctor’.

Doctors must however be explicit and proactive about their GMC status. They must make it clear whether they are registered with or without a licence to practise. To present themselves as registered with or without a licence when they are not, is a criminal offence.

Doctors holding registration without a licence will not be subject to the requirements of revalidation because they will have no licence to renew.

Further information is available from the GMC at:

http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/licensing/faq_licence_to_practise.asp#2
I am still on the GMC Register but gave up my licence to practise when I retired after 35 years in the same practice. Most people in our town know that I am a doctor. Does revalidation mean I need to reapply for a licence to practise in case a neighbour ‘knocks on my door’ in an emergency, or in case I come across an accident and people expect me to help?

You do not need to retain a licence to practise if you have retired and no longer treat patients.

Being unregistered, or registered without a licence to practise, does not stop you helping in emergencies (sometimes called ‘Good Samaritan’ acts). Any concerned citizen can offer help, whether they are medically qualified or not.

If you are registered but don’t have a licence to practise, you will need to bear in mind that Good Medical Practice says: In an emergency, wherever it arises, you must offer assistance, taking account of your own safety, your competence, and the availability of other options of care.

We recommend that you check with your medical defence organisation or insurer if you are worried about potential liabilities if you offer help when you are unregistered or registered without a licence to practise.

Doctors holding registration without a licence will not be subject to the requirements of revalidation because they will have no licence to renew.

Further information is available from the GMC at:

http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/registration_applications/12637.asp#8

http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/licensing/faq_licence_to_practise.asp#2

I applied to relinquish my registration when I took a 3-year career break and was granted voluntary erasure. I now wish to return to work. What is the process for re-registering?

The GMC will consider that you are currently ‘not registered - having relinquished registration’. The process you will need to follow depends upon the role you plan to return to, and whether or not you will require a licence to practise. Please see above.
Help! I’ve just discovered that my name was erased from the General Medical Council register after I moved house and lost contact with the GMC. What do I need to do to re-register?

The Medical Act gives the GMC powers to erase a doctor’s name from the register for various administrative reasons. These reasons include the failure to respond within a specified period to a letter sent by the Registrar of the GMC.

The GMC will consider that you are currently ‘not registered – administrative reason’. The process you will need to follow depends upon whether or not you will require a licence to practise.

We recommend that you discuss your specific circumstances with the GMC (and your employer if appropriate).

General GMC advice on re-registration is available at:

a. If you want to apply for registration with a licence to practise
b. If you want to apply for registration without a licence to practise