

CQC Consultation: National Guardian
CQC National Customer Service Centre
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4PA

09 December 2015

Dear sir/madam

A National Guardian for the NHS – A response from the General Pharmaceutical Council

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is the regulator for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacy premises in Great Britain. Our role is to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and the public who use pharmaceutical services in England, Scotland and Wales.

We have a statutory role in relation to ‘system’ regulation (as we regulate registered pharmacies) as well as ‘professional’ regulation of individual pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. Our main work includes:

- setting standards for the education and training of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support staff, and approving and accrediting their qualifications and training
- maintaining a register of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacies
- setting the standards of conduct and performance that pharmacy professionals have to meet throughout their careers
- setting the standards of continuing professional development that pharmacy professionals have to achieve throughout their careers
- investigating concerns that pharmacy professionals are not meeting our standards, and taking action to restrict their ability to practise when this is necessary to protect patients and the public
- setting standards for registered pharmacies which require them to provide a safe and effective service to patients
- inspecting registered pharmacies to check if they are meeting our standards

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on establishing a National Guardian role for the NHS. We believe that a culture of openness in the NHS, and across healthcare in general, is critical to improving safety and ensuring there is less emphasis on blame and more focus on transparency, speaking up and learning from mistakes when things go wrong.

Whilst the consultation document as a whole is of interest to us we have limited our response to general feedback on areas where we feel our work is directly relevant to the proposals. The principles in relation to the National Guardian do not directly apply to registered pharmacies as these sit outside NHS Trust structures. However, we are committed to embedding in our work, the learning from reports into high profile failures of care, including the Francis and Berwick reports and are keen to contribute to future discussion and work in this area.

We know that health professionals being open and honest when things go wrong is fundamental to protecting patients and upholding their confidence in health professionals and providers of care. This is something we have observed through our own regulatory work and have identified the importance of partnership working as part of the desire to tackle some of the barriers to cultural change and we have highlighted some of that learning in this response. We have reflected on the importance of an open and honest culture, and have worked to embed this in all our work.

To date, we have:

- produced a joint statement with other health professional regulators about the duty of candour
- included a specific standard about 'openness, honesty and learning' in our standards for registered pharmacies
- included specific guidance about the duty of candour and raising concerns in our decision making guidance for statutory committees
- considered how to make explicit the requirement for pharmacy professionals to speak up when they have concerns or things go wrong in our standards of conduct, ethics and performance.

We support the powerful and compelling messages in the Freedom to Speak Up report. The role of National Guardian is an important step in enabling staff to speak up and raise concerns and it should provide leadership in driving the necessary changes. From our regulatory work, including the inspection of registered pharmacies, we see that strong leadership is a key component during periods of change. Leadership, through this role, should reassure and empower healthcare professionals to raise concerns.

The outcomes and actions taken by the National Guardian should promote confidence in those wishing to raise concerns. Our experience also shows that robust and effective

governance procedures, which are widely understood and followed, are effective in delivering quality outcomes and ensuring transparency and independence.

There are a range of avenues and organisations that healthcare professionals can access for support and advice. The National Guardian should complement the existing framework. Effectively communicating the purpose and scope of the role is important in ensuring that the process for reporting concerns, and engaging with the National Guardian, is widely understood and as simple and accessible as possible.

We believe that no one organisation or individual can drive cultural change. It will take a joint effort from all involved; professionals and their leadership bodies, employers, education providers, regulators and governments; to embed the culture of openness and make it the everyday norm.

In pharmacy, we have seen leadership bodies and trade sector organisations have worked collaboratively to promote a culture of openness, including reporting and learning from medication incidents. This highlights the importance of achieving common goals through collaborative working. The relationship between the National Guardian and professional regulators, including ourselves, will therefore be important and should complement and support the strong focus on openness, honesty and candour in our current work. In this connection we have a Memorandum of Understanding with the CQC and this could also provide a framework for collaborative working with the National Guardian.

Collaboration is also important throughout the guardian network. We support the emphasis on building on existing good practice in trusts. The quality of advice and support to Local Guardians will be key to driving cultural change.

If you would like to discuss the points raised in this response, or any other aspects of the GPhC's work, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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