About the General Pharmaceutical Council

Protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and people who use pharmacy services in 2010/2011
1. About us

- there are over 1.6 million visits a day to pharmacies in Great Britain. The job of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is to make sure that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, and the services they deliver, are safe

- our role is to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and people who use pharmacy services. This role is set out in legislation called the Pharmacy Order

- we protect the public in two main ways – by registering competent professionals to practise pharmacy and by regulating the system for managing and delivering retail pharmacy services

- we came into operation on 27 September 2010 and are the first independent regulator for pharmacy in Great Britain. Previously the regulatory role was held by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, which continues to be the professional body for pharmacy

- our work covers England, Scotland and Wales, but not Northern Ireland, where the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is the regulator

- we are not part of nor run by government, and we are not part of the civil service or public sector

- we are funded by fees paid by the individual pharmacy professionals and pharmacies that register with us

- our work touches the lives of pharmacy professionals from the day they start their training to when they stop practising and are no longer on our register

- there were 43,500 pharmacists, 11,500 pharmacy technicians and 13,500 pharmacy premises on our register in 2010/2011

- we are based in London but have staff working around Great Britain, including our inspectors, who visit and inspect pharmacies registered with us

- we have a governing council made up of seven pharmacy professionals and seven members of the public. It includes at least one member who lives or works in each of England, Scotland and Wales. Find out more about them at http://pharmacyregulation.org/about-us/who-we-are/gphc-council/gphc-council-members

- the governing council meets six times a year. Those meetings are open for the public to attend – you can find out more at http://pharmacyregulation.org/about-us/who-we-are/gphc-council/council-meetings

- our chief executive and registrar, Duncan Rudkin, is accountable to this governing council. Three directors lead the main executive functions of the council. Find out more about them at http://pharmacyregulation.org/about-us/who-we-are/organisation/executive-team

To find out more about us, go to http://pharmacyregulation.org/about-us

call us on 020 3365 3400

e-mail us at info@pharmacyregulation.org

You can check the register, which is an online system to keep you informed about who is registered and whether we have made any decisions about their fitness to practise.
You can also search to see whether a pharmacy is registered with us.
Go to http://pharmacyregulation.org/theregister/index.aspx
Our role in the lives of pharmacy professionals

We are involved in the lives of pharmacy professionals from the day they start their training. We:

**set standards and accredit courses** for the education and training of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, as well as:
- assure the quality of the year-long pre-registration training which pharmacist trainees must undertake before they can apply for registration
- set and run the final exam that pharmacist trainees must pass to be able to register
- check that registered pharmacy professionals are keeping their skills and knowledge up to date.

**register competent professionals** who have to be registered to practise as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician and to use one of those titles.

**register pharmacies** such as high street and supermarket pharmacies, and some hospital pharmacies.

**set and monitor standards** to keep patients and those who use pharmacy services safe, and which pharmacy professionals and pharmacies must meet to stay registered.

**inspect pharmacies** to check that they are meeting our standards.

**take action when our standards are not met**, which can range from investigating concerns and closing a case, to writing a letter of advice, placing conditions on registration, suspending someone from working as a pharmacy professional for a specified period through to removing them from the register. If taken off the register, pharmacy professionals cannot apply for registration again for a minimum of five years.

Education and training

Wherever you are in Great Britain, training to become a pharmacist takes a minimum of five years.

Pharmacists must achieve a masters degree in pharmacy (MPharm) from a course we have accredited. They must spend a year gaining practical experience in a working pharmacy, under the supervision of a tutor, who must be a registered pharmacist. A trainee must then sit our registration exam, which they must pass to an acceptable standard to be able to apply to be on the register.

Pharmacy technicians must complete two years of work-based experience under the direction of a pharmacist, and achieve both competency-based and knowledge-based qualifications from courses which we have recognised or accredited.

We also accredit courses for pharmacy support staff, including dispensing assistants and medicines counter assistants.

By accreditation, we mean that we approve courses which maintain the standards that we set for the education and training of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians so that they are competent to practise safely and effectively.

You can find out more about our education and training work at [http://www.pharmacyregulation.org/education](http://www.pharmacyregulation.org/education)
Once a pharmacist or pharmacy technician is registered, what happens then?

We set standards which underpin the safe and effective practice of pharmacy. Pharmacy professionals must comply with our standards and follow the law, to remain registered.

We have published standards on:
- conduct, ethics and performance
- retail pharmacy businesses (these are interim standards, for owners of retail pharmacies and superintendent pharmacists)
- continuing professional development (CPD)
- education and training for pharmacists
- education and training for pharmacy technicians.

For more details, go to http://www.pharmacyregulation.org/standards

Every year, we ask pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to renew their registration – and part of this process involves them signing a declaration that they have met all our standards.

We also check that those registered with us are keeping their skills and knowledge up to date. They must record at least nine examples every year. We request to see that information every five years, in a process called “call and review”.

Raising concerns

If concerns are raised about a pharmacist or pharmacy technician registered with us, we will investigate those concerns.

This is part of what we call fitness to practise. It is our job to make sure that anyone who is registered with us is fit to practise pharmacy safely and effectively.

Our work to investigate and take action where concerns are raised is at the heart of our commitment to protecting patients and the public, and maintaining public confidence in pharmacy professionals.

The law sets out a specific role for us – we handle concerns and complaints about the fitness to practise and conduct of registered pharmacy professionals. The sorts of concerns we investigate include:
- errors in dispensing medication
- sexual misconduct
- pharmacy professionals working under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- fraud
- theft
- dishonesty.

Unless there is an allegation about someone’s fitness to practise, we will not investigate. So, we don’t investigate:
- claims for compensation
- customer service issues, such as prescriptions not being available
- contract issues, for example, opening hours or charges for private prescriptions.

If you have concerns about a pharmacist or pharmacy technician registered with us, you can make a formal complaint to us. For more information, go to http://pharmacyregulation.org/raising-concerns or ring our customer contact centre on 020 3365 3400.

We do not handle concerns about specific medicines – these should be directed to the Medicines Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). Go to http://www.mhra.gov.uk for more information.
How do concerns come to us?

From:
- a member of the public (nearly 50 per cent of concerns come to us from members of the public)
- public bodies such as NHS organisations
- law enforcement agencies such as the police or local authorities
- a registrant’s colleague(s)
- one of our own inspectors, following a routine inspection.

How we deal with concerns

Concerns are initially reviewed by one of our case managers, who makes a recommendation on how to proceed. This may include referring the matter to an investigating committee, which meets in private. That investigating committee may take a decision in its own right to go no further or issue a warning or letter of advice, or refer the case to a fitness to practise committee hearing, which is conducted by an independent panel, usually made up of three members.

How do I find out what is happening?

Fitness to practise committee hearings are usually held in public. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

Hearings are held at our offices at 129 Lambeth Road, London SE1 7BT. We publish details of upcoming hearings at http://www.pharmacyregulation.org/raising-concerns/hearings/hearings-schedule

Some fitness to practise committee hearings are held in private if, for example, there are matters involving a Registrant’s health.

We publish decisions of the fitness to practise committee on the register or at http://www.pharmacyregulation.org/search/search_decisions

If you would like to attend a hearing, here is a map showing how to find us. The nearest mainline stations are Waterloo and Vauxhall, and the nearest tube stations are Vauxhall and Lambeth North.

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 ensures that anyone can access GPhC records. Information on how to do this is at http://pharmacyregulation.org/freedom-information

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