

Information for you

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Revalidation: How do I know my doctor is up to date?

Who is this information for?

This information is for you if you want to know about the system used to check that your doctor is up to date, competent and trustworthy (fit to practice). This process is called revalidation.

Revalidation was introduced by the General Medical Council (GMC) to make sure that doctors are working to a good standard. All doctors practising medicine in the UK must be licensed and registered with the GMC. Every doctor that is licensed to practice, whether working in the NHS or in private hospitals, must go through revalidation every five years.

Your doctor has regular appraisals with their employer. This means that they are regularly checked against the professional standards set by the GMC *Good Medical Practice* guidance (see www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/good_medical_practice.asp). These are the standards you can expect them to meet. Revalidation also helps doctors' employers to take action to deal with any concerns about a doctor's practice.

Like the other Royal Colleges, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has worked with the GMC to develop revalidation in its specialty. This is so that you can be sure that your obstetrician or gynaecologist has met the standards needed to provide good care.

What does revalidation involve?

Appraisal

Every year your doctor must have a meeting with their appraiser, a specially trained professional, to review and talk about his or her work. At the meeting, your doctor will discuss their 'folder of evidence', showing how they are meeting the GMC's standards.

The folder of evidence will include:

- evidence of how they are keeping up to date with their medical knowledge and skills, known as 'continuing professional development' (CPD) – see below



- examples of lessons learnt from any complications in patients they have treated
- formal feedback from colleagues and patients – see below
- details of research and projects carried out over the last year to improve the quality of the care they provide
- a plan for the next year's personal development.

During the meeting, your doctor and the appraiser will think about ways in which their treatment of patients could be improved and they will identify goals to be achieved over the next year. The appraiser will make sure that there are no concerns about the way the doctor is doing his or her job.

All doctors must have an annual appraisal for each of the five years to be able to revalidate.

Patient feedback

Feedback from patients helps doctors to improve communication with patients and with the patients' families and carers. At least once during each five-year revalidation cycle, patients picked at random will be asked for feedback about the doctor.

The patient will be asked to fill in a questionnaire by a member of staff (not by the doctor concerned). The feedback is anonymous and may contain both positive and negative comments. It will be discussed at the next annual appraisal meeting, giving the doctor the chance to learn from what has been said and the opportunity to think about ways of improving the quality of the care they offer.

Although patients will only be asked for feedback usually once in each five-year cycle, any patient can give feedback (both good and bad) at any time. Feedback can be separate from any formal complaint you may want to make about your doctor. You can give feedback in various ways, including:

- writing to the doctor concerned
- writing to the chief executive of the hospital that your obstetrician or gynaecologist works in
- contacting (by telephoning or writing) PALS (Patient Advisory Liaison Service) at your hospital – the number is available through your hospital switchboard; PALS will guide you how to give feedback.

Colleague feedback

At least once during the five-year revalidation cycle, all doctors must ask for feedback from their colleagues. This will include other doctors, midwives, nurses and other members of the team. The feedback provided is anonymous and will be discussed at the annual appraisal meeting.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

All doctors must show that their knowledge and skills are up to date as part of appraisal and revalidation. The RCOG CPD guidance is that obstetricians and gynaecologists should keep a record of learning and development that has helped strengthen their professional practice.

Confirming revalidation

Once every five years, all this information will be passed to the 'Responsible Officer', a senior doctor in a healthcare organisation who will make a recommendation to the GMC.

The GMC will make the final decision whether to revalidate a doctor or not.

Can I help with my doctor's revalidation?

The GMC, the RCOG and your doctor very much value patients taking part in doctors' feedback to help improve services. The revalidation process is meant to improve the quality of medical care across the UK.

You can help by giving feedback (both good and bad) about the care you have received. Negative comments may help your doctor think about the concerns you have raised while positive ones help them become aware of which methods and approaches are valued by patients.

Further information can be obtained from:

GMC revalidation: www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/revalidation.asp

GMC *Good Medical Practice*: www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/good_medical_practice.asp