

Government announces start of revalidation

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England's health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has announced that revalidation will begin on 3 December this year.

Revalidation requires that all doctors in the United Kingdom, including locums and doctors working in the private sector, prove every five years that their knowledge is up to date and that they are fit to practise.

Responsible officers (those in charge of making sure that all doctors at their organisation are revalidated) and medical leaders will be revalidated by March 2013. About a fifth of doctors will be revalidated between April 2013 and March 2014, while the majority will be covered by the end of March 2016 and any remaining doctors by the end of March 2018.

Hunt said, "Doctors save lives every day, and making sure they are up to speed with the latest treatments and technologies will help them save even more. This is why a proper system of revalidation is so important."

Hunt also announced that he would consult on the introduction of a "national performers list" of GPs, dentists, and ophthalmologists who have been approved to provide NHS primary care services. This list, which would be held by the NHS Commissioning Board, would replace the local lists held by each primary care trust.

Currently, if a badly performing doctor is taken off a list, he or she can move to another area and keep practising. Hunt said, "It is right that information about a doctor moves with them around the country as they do. By introducing a single national performers list, poor performers will no longer be able to slip through the gaps between different local lists."

The consultation also suggested that the NHS Commissioning Board could have the power to immediately suspend healthcare professionals whose conduct created a serious risk to the public.

Peter Rubin, chairman of the GMC, welcomed the health secretary's decision to give the green light to revalidation. He said, "This is a historic day for patients and for the medical profession. We are confident that the introduction of revalidation will make a major contribution to the quality of care that patients receive and will give them valuable assurance that the doctors who treat them are regularly assessed against our professional standards."

The chairman of the BMA council, Mark Porter, said that the BMA had always supported the principle of revalidation because it was important that patients had confidence in doctors' skills and knowledge. But he added, "It is essential that revalidation is reviewed every step of the way so that we can be sure that the system works for patients and for doctors."

The director of NHS Employers, Dean Royles, said that the decision to start revalidation was a "very positive step forward and should herald greater patient safety and build confidence." He said, "Patients need and expect this. It has been a long time coming. After years of planning and preparation the hard work of implementation now begins in earnest."

He added, "We must avoid the trap of thinking that this announcement means the job is done. The implementation of revalidation will be a challenge and requires active commitment. Making sure the process works in practice is what will be key to its success."

Read more about revalidation in BMJ Careers at <http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/article-search.html?action=browseByTopic&categoryId=1008>.

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