



NEWS

RCGP calls on GMC to introduce mandatory and public declaration of interests register

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The Royal College of General Practitioners will call on the General Medical Council to ensure that all doctors registered in the UK have declared their conflicts of interests, as part of a mandatory scheme.

The move comes after the college council “overwhelmingly” passed a motion on 23 November, which said that declaring interests must be a condition of registering with the GMC, that declarations must be reviewed “at least annually,” and must be held on a publicly available register.¹

The council said that it believes that all healthcare professionals should make similar declarations of interest, and any associated costs for implementing this should be met by the government.

The motion was proposed by GP Margaret McCartney, who has long argued for such a scheme. Speaking at the RCGP conference in 2018, she said, “If I were a patient taking advice from my doctor and I didn’t know whether he or she had a conflict of interest, I would be concerned. We have to show that we are deserving of trust. We have to take the lead and say we want to get this better. Now has to be the time to sort it out.”²

GP John Cosgrove, who seconded the council motion, said, “We should be immensely grateful to Margaret for her indefatigable resolve over many years to make declarations of interest by doctors routine, public, and, now, universal.

“From a practical point of view, to have just one central register of interests could save each of us the trouble of remembering to update the register of each organisation we are associated with—and the potential embarrassment of forgetting to do so.”

The GMC has previously acknowledged calls for declarations of interest to be added to its registration process, but has not made any indication that it will act on this.³

A GMC spokesperson said that the law would need to change to make conflict declarations mandatory for doctors.

“In 2016 we consulted with doctors, employers, and patients on introducing a voluntary scheme, which would not first require legislative change. The result of the consultation showed that the overwhelming majority did not feel that the GMC register was the right vehicle for this type of information,” they said.

“However, it is possible attitudes are shifting over time—in which case having more flexible legislation would allow us to explore this option in the future. We have been pushing for legislative change for some years now, including having the flexibility to gather certain types of information.”

A BMA spokesperson said that competing interests were a natural part of medical practice, but that they had the potential to undermine trust, both in individual doctors and in the profession.

They added, “Where competing interests cannot readily be avoided, they should be openly and transparently declared. As part of the BMA’s own internal governance processes, we have a declarations of interests policy, and all of our elected members are expected to complete declaration of interest forms.”

1 RCGP. Twitter. 23 November 2019. <https://twitter.com/rcgp/status/1198217944528019462>.

2 Iacobucci G. GMC should hold conflicts of interest register for all doctors, says McCartney. *BMJ* 2018;363:k4230. 10.1136/bmj.k4230 30297483

3 General Medical Council. Developing the UK medical register. 23 February 2017. www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/M06_Developing_the_UK_medical_register.pdf_69417294.pdf.

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