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Covid-19: Solely refusing vaccine will not trigger a fitness to practise investigation, says GMC

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The General Medical Council (GMC) does not consider refusal of covid-19 vaccine to be a sufficient reason for launching a fitness to practise investigation, the regulator has said in a joint statement with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges.¹

Issued on 10 February, the statement follows the government's last minute U turn on a plan to make covid-19 vaccination mandatory for NHS staff in England—a move that health leaders had warned would further exacerbate the staffing crisis in the NHS.²

But the statement said that “while the GMC does not consider that solely turning down vaccination would in itself form the basis of a fitness to practise referral, doctors have a professional duty to protect patients from risks posed by their health, and to be immunised against common serious communicable diseases, unless contraindicated.”

It added that “being a good doctor means more than simply being a good clinician” and emphasised that there was a clear case for doctors to get vaccinated against covid-19 to protect their own health but also their patients.

“Reducing the number of staff members who are sick or in self-isolation also has a positive impact on workforce capacity to respond to patient need and wider health service demands,” the organisations wrote.

The GMC reviewed and updated its advice on vaccinations for doctors after the government officially announced that it had begun consulting on revoking the mandatory vaccination regulations.³

Over 95% of doctors have already received at least two covid-19 vaccinations, and the majority have also received a third, “booster” dose.

Earlier this week England's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, and NHS England's medical director for primary care, Nikki Kanani, also wrote to doctors telling them that it was their “professional responsibility” to get vaccinated against covid-19 as recommended.⁴

1 Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. Doctors' vaccination: Joint statement from the GMC and Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. 10 Feb 2022. <https://www.aomrc.org.uk/statements/doctors-vaccination-joint-statement-from-the-gmc-and-academy-of-medical-royal-colleges/>

2 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: Government abandons mandatory vaccination of NHS staff. *BMJ* 2022;376:o269. doi: 10.1136/bmj.o269 pmid: 35105551

3 Department of Health and Social Care. Open consultation: Revoking vaccination as a condition of deployment across all health and social care. 9 Feb 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/revoking-vaccination-as-a-condition-of-deployment-across-all-health-and-social-care>

4 Whitty C. Twitter. 8 Feb 2022. https://twitter.com/CMO_England/status/1490975576676769794

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