

## TAKE-HOME NOTES:

**Helping the addicted doctor**

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**Awareness**

One in 15 doctors has, at some stage, had some form of alcohol or drug dependence: a rate similar to that of others within this socio-economic group (US data).

**Range of substances**

The order of problem substances is as follows:

- alcohol
- benzodiazepines
- opiates
- cocaine.

Early signs of alcohol misuse are detailed in SIGN 74 Annex 2. (<http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/sign74.pdf>)

Knowledge of illicit drug effects is required to ensure early detection. These include acute effects, withdrawal effects, overdose signs, and long term use problems.

**Legal and ethical issues**

The GMC now has fitness to practise regulations for medical students as well as registered doctors. Any illicit drug use, even 'recreational' is breaking the law and as such would be taken up by the GMC if notified, as it may not meet 'standards for professional behaviour'. This also applies to medical students, and may prevent them from registering with the GMC once graduated. See [http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/Medical\\_students\\_Professional\\_behaviour\\_and\\_ftp.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/Medical_students_Professional_behaviour_and_ftp.pdf)

All illegal drugs pose a risk to medical careers as doctors convicted of drug offences, including drink driving are automatically referred to the GMC.

Necessity of early detection and treatment:

- risk to patients
- deteriorating performance, active misconduct
- potential loss of expensively training personnel
- good response to treatment when linked to work place supervision.

Most doctors come to treatment through concerns about their behaviour, presenting with acute intoxication or committing various offences secondary to substance misuse. One aim of this module is that early detection and awareness of confidential treatments that are successful could result in less coerced late presentation.

Once it is felt that a doctor may be compromising the safety of the public or working below the standards expected in practice the GMC involvement is guided by a formal process (see: [http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/doctors\\_under\\_investigation/guide\\_for\\_doctors.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/doctors_under_investigation/guide_for_doctors.pdf))

## Sources of help

Different sources of help available to doctors in the UK include:

- self help/support groups
- the general practitioner
- occupational health departments
- National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS)
- Secondary Services with a Consultant Psychiatrist in Addiction.

Psychiatrists are most likely to be referred to NCAS.

## Case studies

You could be held negligent if you ignore clear signs that colleagues may not be fit to practise. Doing nothing is not an option.

Substance use as a coping strategy should always be seen as a warning of possible future problems.

Good Medical Practice (GMP) is that 'you should not treat yourself' nor 'anyone with whom you have a close personal relationship'. Register and access a GP.

GMP also requires you to 'act without delay if you have good reason to believe that you or a colleague may be putting patients at risk'. Doing nothing is not an option. What is done requires a proportionate graded response preferably shared with other colleagues, often including a clinical line manager and should be documented. If in doubt Medical Defence Organisations will advise.

## Further training and self-awareness

Of the 160,000 doctors in clinical practice in the UK, less than 300 are under supervision per year. Of these, 200 are new supervisions and 100 continuing cases.

Most GMC medical examiners and supervisors are psychiatrists or general practitioners. Doctors interested in taking on such a role are requested to submit a CV and be interviewed.

Training includes working through a CD-rom, being observed interviewing actors, and preparing relevant reports.

Successful candidates can take on this work not only being remunerated but knowing they are helping colleagues return to work safely and successfully.

Availability of confidential treatment avenues may encourage doctors to seek help before their fitness to practice is affected:

- GP or Occupational Health Departments
- **Psychiatrists' Support Service**
- British Doctors and Dentists Group
- BMA Counseling
- National Clinical Assessment Service
- AA or other substance-focused 12 step programme
- Secondary service from Specialist e.g. Consultant Psychiatrist in Addiction

See the contact details below under **Useful websites**.

### Self-care check list:

1. Do you have a family history of substance misuse?
2. Do you have a family history of mental illness?
3. Have you ever used, abused or been dependant on substances, gambling, or suffered from a mood or eating disorder?
4. Are you registered with a GP where you are currently working?
5. Have you ever written a prescription for yourself?
6. Do you know whom to approach for advice on health matters for yourself or a colleague?
7. Do you have a mentor/supportive colleagues?
8. Are you happy with your work/life balance?
9. Do you raise these matters with trainees at induction and in supervision, particularly at times of stress – after complaints or a suicide?

### Useful websites

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| <b>Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)</b>            | <a href="http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/">http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/</a><br><br>AA is the first and arguably most successful self-help group for alcohol addiction. National helpline: 0845 769 7555                                 |
| <b>BMA Counselling</b>                      | <a href="http://www.bma.org.uk/doctors_health/D4Dabout.jsp">http://www.bma.org.uk/doctors_health/D4Dabout.jsp</a><br><br>BMA Counselling offers a confidential telephone helpline free to all doctors. Telephone: 08459 200 169                           |
| <b>British Doctors' and Dentists' Group</b> | <a href="http://www.bddg.org/">http://www.bddg.org/</a><br><br>The self-help section of the charity Medical Council on Alcohol. Telephone 07771 642 682                                                                                                   |
| <b>Medical Council on Alcohol</b>           | <a href="http://www.m-c-a.org.uk/">http://www.m-c-a.org.uk/</a><br><br>5 St Andrews Place<br>London<br>NW1 4LB<br>Email: <a href="mailto:mca@medicouncilacol.demon.co.uk">mca@medicouncilacol.demon.co.uk</a><br>Tel: 020 7487 4445<br>Fax: 020 7935 4479 |

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|                                             | <p>Medical Council on Alcohol is a charitable group of doctors seeking to promote teaching, training, research and develop services for alcohol problems. Its self-help section is the <a href="#">British Doctors and Dentists Group</a>.</p>                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Narcotics Anonymous (NA)</b>             | <p><a href="http://www.ukna.org/">http://www.ukna.org/</a></p> <p>Narcotics Anonymous offers a similar 12 step programme to the AA, but for other addictions.<br/>Helpline: 0300 999 12 12</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>National Clinical Assessment Service</b> | <p><a href="http://www.ncas.npsa.nhs.uk/">http://www.ncas.npsa.nhs.uk/</a></p> <p>Its aim is to help local organisations develop effective systems to manage doctors with identified performance problems, including those following on from addictions.<br/>General enquiries: 020 7062 1620</p>                                                                                               |
| <b>Practitioner Health Programme</b>        | <p><a href="http://www.php.nhs.uk/">http://www.php.nhs.uk/</a></p> <p>A free confidential service for doctors and dentists in the London area.<br/>Helpline: 020 3049 4505</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Psychiatrists' Support Service</b>       | <p><a href="http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/member/psychiatristsupportservice.aspx">http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/member/psychiatristsupportservice.aspx</a></p> <p>Psychiatrists' Support Service is a confidential advisory and signposting telephone helpline available for doctors in difficulty.<br/>Direct line: 020 7245 0412</p>                                                                    |
| <b>Sick Doctors Trust</b>                   | <p><a href="http://www.sick-doctors-trust.co.uk/">http://www.sick-doctors-trust.co.uk/</a></p> <p>Sick Doctors Trust offers a 24 hour telephone helpline. It is a UK organisation which gives support, information on treatment options and funding for treatment. It also welcomes medical students and supports family members and runs local support groups.<br/>Helpline: 0370 444 5163</p> |