

Dear Prof Stephenson

I write as chair of Doctors for the NHS to request a meeting with you to discuss the role of the GMC in maintaining professional standards in challenging circumstances.

Briefly, increasing numbers of doctors are expected to work in an increasingly hostile environment e.g. reduced resources, but without recognition that this might compromise our ability to deliver the service safely i.e. the standards remain the same while our ability to deliver them drops. This puts doctors between a rock and a hard place with no concession to the pressures from our professional regulators.

The changing situation in the NHS means that doctors may be expected to act unethically e.g. reduce referrals, cut services etc and may face financial inducements or managerial pressure to do so.

Individual medical practice is profoundly affected by the wider environment and the GMC should voice public concern when it becomes detrimental to medical practice. For example, the UK has fewer medical practitioners, fewer nurses and fewer beds per head of population than most other EU countries. We note Donald Berwick has shown many cases of poor individual practice are a reflection of institutional dysfunction.

We believe the GMC should help doctors under pressure through drawing attention to these facts and providing guidance on how they can deal with these issues without fear of recrimination.

Eric Watts

DM FRCP FRCPath, Chair Doctors for the NHS