

## GDC statement on complaints during the pandemic welcomed



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A statement by the GDC which reiterates its commitment to take the COVID-19 pandemic context into account when assessing complaints that are raised about dental professionals has been welcomed by dental indemnity providers.

The statement, which was also signed by the GMC and a number of other health and social care regulators, follows a similar joint statement issued near the start of the pandemic.

It acknowledges that the individuals on the registers 'may feel anxious about how context is taken into account when concerns are raised about their decisions and actions in very challenging circumstances' and confirms that where a concern is raised about a registered professional, it will always be considered on the specific facts of the case, taking into account the factors relevant to the environment in which the professional is working. It says any relevant information about resource, guidelines or protocols in place at the time would also be taken into account.

Separately, the GDC has also developed supplementary advice to support case examiners in considering factors relating to the impact of COVID-19 on a dental professional's ability to deliver care.

Dental Protection said the renewed GDC commitment would be well received, but must stand the test of time. A survey of the organisation's members showed that two in five dentists (40%) said fear of investigations arising from difficult decisions made during COVID-19, or disruption to care, was having most impact on their mental wellbeing.

**'The statement, which was also signed by the GMC and a number of other health and social care regulators, follows a similar joint statement issued near the start of the pandemic'**

Raj Rattan, Dental Director at Dental Protection said: 'We are pleased that the GDC, alongside other health and social care regulators, has taken this step to again reassure dental professionals.'

'Throughout this period, dental professionals have told us about a range of issues that have been impacting their mental wellbeing – from concern for their patients, the health of their family, friends

and colleagues, the impact of loss of income, and the challenges of adapting to new ways of working.'

'There has been a growing concern about the risk of regulatory investigation, and how actions and clinical interventions may be perceived in any future investigation if insufficient consideration is given to the impact of the pandemic. The risk is that hindsight bias is real because memories fade over time and it is important to safeguard against this.'

'Ongoing reassurance from the GDC on how the context of the COVID-19 pandemic will be taken into account, alongside the supplementary advice developed for its case examiners, will therefore go some way towards easing these fears and we are glad the GDC have heeded our calls for this. Recognising that by the very nature of dental care, a complaint and subsequent investigation can arise several years after the event, it is crucial that the GDC's guidance stands the test of time, lest the very real pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing disruption of care be forgotten. We will continue to monitor this closely to ensure that dental professionals are protected.'

Dr Len D'Cruz, Head of BDA Indemnity, added: 'During 2021, BDA Indemnity received an unprecedented number of calls from dentists seeking advice about the decisions they needed to take on behalf of patients and their staff to provide the best care under the challenging circumstances. The inevitable delays to some patient treatments have resulted in an elevated number of complaints, matched by a similar elevation in the level of stress that colleagues face in trying to run their businesses.'

'The BDA welcomes the GDC's reassurance that, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it would not penalise a dentist for making a well-grounded professional judgment about the best way to meet patients' needs, including where that judgement is to reduce or stop activity. Practices continue to face unprecedented pressure from patients to be seen as well as commissioners to deliver on NHS targets and the GDC and Fitness to Practise panel need to recognise these very real pressures.'