



What does the GDC really do?

The General Dental Council (GDC) is the UK-wide statutory regulator of the whole dental team, across the four nations of the UK. That's over 117,000 dental professionals. But do you really know what the regulator does?

Protecting the public

The General Dental Council's (GDC's) primary role is the same as that of all health regulators: to protect the public and ensure that the public have confidence in the healthcare professionals they regulate.

To achieve this, the GDC does a number of different things, known as its statutory functions.

Firstly, it sets the learning outcomes and behaviours for all undergraduate dental training in the UK. This ensures that any new dental professionals joining the register are taught the right skills and training and are safe to practise. To do this it carries out regular quality assurance inspections¹ of education providers to ensure they are meeting the right education standards.

Secondly, it holds a register of all dental professionals who are allowed to practise in the UK, and grants registration only to those dental professionals who meet its

requirements on education and training, health and good character. Only those people who are registered with the GDC can practise dentistry in the UK.

There are professional standards that need to be met so that patients can be confident that dental treatment is safe, and that is the third area where the GDC has legislative powers. While the GDC doesn't set clinical standards (that's done by the Royal Colleges and others), it does set the professional standards for conduct, performance and ethics for the whole dental team.

The GDC also ensures that you keep your skills up to date by setting the continuing professional development (CPD) requirements.² CPD is a requirement of being a member of the dental team and is something you all must do to maintain your registration – but why is it so important? Undertaking CPD is a vital part of demonstrating your commitment to professionalism and it

allows you to stay up to date with the latest developments, technologies and treatments. It will benefit patients and your own development if you put CPD at the heart of what you do.

We also know that good employers are increasingly looking for members of the dental team who are committed to their professional development and who have a wide range of skills and knowledge that will benefit their practice.

These are all functions that focus on prevention, rather than dealing with something after things have gone wrong, and this is where most of the GDC's work – and effort – is focused.

Patients need to have somewhere to go if they have a concern

It's also important that patients and the public have somewhere to go if something goes wrong, or if they have a concern about

a member of the dental team.³ To do this the GDC has fitness to practise processes, where they will act to protect the public if any dental professional falls short of their professional standards.

There are two things to understand about the GDC's role with regards to fitness to practise.

The first is that the GDC will always recommend that patients who have a concern should raise that with the dental professional or practice first. It would always encourage dental professionals to seek feedback from their patients and look to resolve any concerns that they do receive with the patient, where they can. This will almost always result in a better outcome for both the patient and the dental professional.

The second point is that when the GDC does receive a concern, it is legally bound to investigate it, and that may mean they contact you to find out a bit more information.

However, it's important to remember that the number of concerns the GDC receives is small, and the ones that result in any consequences for dental professionals is even smaller, compared to the 117,000 dental professionals it regulates.

What do patients expect from dental professionals?

The GDC has set out nine principles of professionalism in its standards,⁴ and it should come as no surprise that the first four of these are focused on how dental teams should engage with patients.

Dentistry differs from most forms of healthcare, as it is not free at the point of delivery. Patient expectations are changing, and they have a very clear idea of what they want and expect from dental teams.

Patients want you to put their interests before any financial gain or business need. They expect you to be appropriately trained and qualified and to work as a team. They also expect that you will maintain professional behaviour and act with integrity, communicate clearly and acknowledge their preferences and concerns with them.

When it comes to their personal data and information, they expect you to keep their records secure, up to date, accurate and clear and that you will work within current laws and regulations.

Finally, if things do go wrong, they expect you to deal with any complaint or concern promptly.

Patients expect these things from their dental professional to stay safe and have confidence in the dental services they receive and so do the GDC. That's why it's important

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CPD

10 HOURS

2 YEARS

gdc-uk.org/ecpd

'While the GDC doesn't set clinical standards (that's done by the Royal Colleges and others), it does set the professional standards for conduct, performance and ethics for the whole dental team.'

Keep your skills up to date and innovate

General Dental Council

to understand and work to these nine principles.⁴

Finally, it's important to remember that working in a regulated profession comes with responsibility and that as dental professionals you should ensure that your behaviour, both at work, and in your personal life, is of a high professional standard and that you do not do anything that might affect the public's confidence in the dental professionals that the GDC regulates.

What the GDC does NOT do

Over the years there have been many

misconceptions amongst dental professionals about the GDC's remit and what it does. So, having explained what it does, and its role in public safety and confidence, we thought it was worthwhile sharing what the GDC is not responsible for.

The GDC only registers dental professionals, not dental practices. The regulation of practices is the responsibility of the different systems regulators across the four nations, for example the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England.

Neither does the GDC represent the interests of dental professionals; as we

Put CPD at the heart of your professionalism

General Dental Council



‘As dental professionals you should ensure that your behaviour, both at work, and in your personal life, is of a high professional standard and that you do not do anything that might affect the public’s confidence in the dental professionals that the GDC regulates.’

described earlier, it is the regulator’s core purpose to **protect the public**. Representing the interests of dental professionals is a key role of the professional bodies across all the professions, such as the British Dental Association (BDA), British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT), the Dental Technologists Association (DTA) and the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN). That said, the GDC does work very closely with all the professional bodies in delivering its regulatory functions.

Finally, the GDC doesn’t set pay levels for dental professionals or have any powers to influence employers with regards to the salaries they pay their staff. And although the GDC has an interest in workforce, as it maintains the register, responsibility for workforce planning sits with the individual Governments, and setting the NHS fee levels and NHS contracts are the responsibility of the NHS across the four nations of the UK.

You can find out more information on the GDC’s website <https://www.gdc-uk.org/>,

or if you have a question, you can email communications@gdc-uk.org.

References

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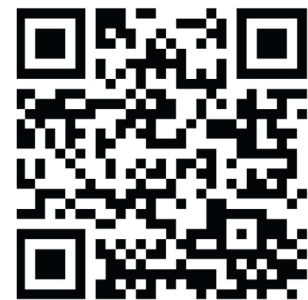
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