**ALLIANCE Live:**

**Advice from the General Medical Council: what we’re doing during COVID-19**

**Featuring Eilidh Carmichael, GMC**

**7 April 2020**

**Andrew Strong (the ALLIANCE):**

Welcome to ALLIANCE Live. This podcast was recorded during the COVID-19 crisis, when many people with long term conditions, disabled people and unpaid carers are isolated and the support that they use remains under pressure.

For general advice on COVID-19 and its symptoms please visit [nhsinform.scot/coronavirus](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Candrew.strong%5CDownloads%5Cnhsinform.scot%5Ccoronavirus). This information is accurate at the date of recording (7 April 2020).

During this very difficult period the ALLIANCE is producing a series of podcasts for people living with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers. These will cover advice, support, and comment on COVID-19.

In this podcast we hear from Eilidh Carmichael, Policy Officer at the General Medical Council, on what you can expect from Doctors during the crisis.

**Eilidh Carmichael:**

Hi there. I’m Eilidh, and I’m a Policy Officer at the General Medical Council. You might have heard of us referred to before as the GMC, and that’s probably what I’ll say as I’m talking you through our role, and what patients can expect from their doctors during the pandemic.

The GMC has a number of roles, each with patient safety at its heart. The important thing to know for this update is that the GMC holds the register of all the doctors in the UK. If someone wants to be a doctor here, they have to be on that register, and they have to fulfil certain criteria – both to get on, and to stay on. We also help to protect patients and improve medical education and practice in the UK by setting standards for doctors and students. We support them in achieving and exceeding those standards and may take action when they are not met. Our guidance includes specific advice on areas like confidentiality, consent and end of life care.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a fast-moving situation, and we understand that patients may feel anxious about how the pandemic may affect their safety and quality of care. Doctors and the whole healthcare team are under intense pressure at the moment. They’re trying to do their best for all the patients they treat, and to protect the health of the public. Much non-urgent care will be delayed while members of the healthcare team work in different ways to their usual practice. It might be reassuring to know that we’ve published a range of information and advice for doctors, to support them in their practice during this challenging time. We’ve highlighted that it’s likely that as the situation develops, some doctors will need to depart from established procedures to care for patients – but doctors are still accountable for decisions they make. They are expected to continue to do their best to deliver good care, and follow our guidance as far as is practical in the circumstances. That means they should treat you with dignity and respect, listen to your concerns, and discuss options with you. We are clear in all of this that patients must not be exposed to unnecessary risk. We expect that doctors will continue to behave responsibly and reasonably, as they do now. They should be able to explain the reasons behind their decisions and actions if they’re called on to do so.

We understand that this is a challenging time. We will continue to provide information and advice for doctors as the situation develops. As part of the UK guidance on the pandemic, we have already written to nearly 40,000 fully qualified and experienced doctors, to let them know they’ve either been given temporary registration or have had their licence returned. All those who are returning to the register gave up their license in the last six years. They have a choice about whether they want to return to practice and can opt out at any time. For those doctors based in Scotland, we’ll give their details to the NHS here, and NHS Scotland will then contact individuals if they want to ask them to return to work. We’re also going to start the annual provisional registration process for final year medical students. We’ll still be following our usual policies and procedures to ensure that students are fit to practice, but we’ll process applications a little earlier in the year than usual. Students will still need to apply to the GMC for their provisional registration, which will only be granted once their medical schools confirm they’ve graduated. This will potentially make 7,500 newly qualified doctors available to the health service three months earlier than usual, if they are asked and are willing to start work.

Of course, in all of this, you have an important role to play in supporting the NHS. We can all help by following the latest advice on the NHS inform website, following the Government’s advice, seeking alternative sources of help where appropriate – maybe from a pharmacist – being understanding of the pressure on doctors and healthcare staff, and of course treating all NHS staff with respect. I hope this information has been useful. The GMC will continue to keep our advice up to date as this situation develops. You can always check our website, which is [gmc-uk.org/](https://www.gmc-uk.org/), to see the latest information. Thank you for listening!

**Andrew Strong (the ALLIANCE):**

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