



Supporting medical students with mental health conditions



General
Medical
Council

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A growing body of research shows that medical students are more prone to mental health conditions than their peers. But they are often reluctant to acknowledge that they have a condition and to seek the support that they need.

As a result, we have jointly developed new guidance with the Medical Schools Council to help medical schools better support medical students with mental health conditions. You can read the guidance at www.gmc-uk.org/mentalhealth.

Busting myths around mental health

The guidance outlines some common misconceptions that medical students often have about mental health.

'If I have a mental health condition, it will damage my career prospects.'

Mental health conditions are common in the general population and commonly occur in doctors. Legally, employers can't discriminate against you if you have a mental health condition.

'Medical students, like doctors, must be perfect and indestructible – we should not need prescription medication for our mental health.'

At any one time, 15–25% of the general population experience mild-to-moderate mental health conditions. This includes doctors, many of whom will take medication for their conditions. This is perfectly normal and acceptable.

'If I tell my medical school that I have a mental health condition, I will automatically be referred to a fitness to practise committee.'

This should not be the case. If you engage with your medical school and ask for support and follow the advice given, then there will be no need for a fitness to practise committee to be involved.

'Seeking help is seen as a sign of weakness.' Seeking help is the strong thing to do. It is also the right thing to do. Your medical school has systems in place to support you and they want you to do well.

'Psychiatric treatments are usually ineffective.' This is not true. Treatments for mental health conditions show high clinical effectiveness and compare favourably to treatments for common physical health conditions.

'If I see my GP, I will just be prescribed antidepressants.' There is a wide range of effective treatments for mental health problems, including talking therapies. Your GP should involve you in decisions about your care.

'I can never take time out from my studies.' Medical students can and do take time out from their studies. If you are concerned, you should ask your medical school for advice.

'Mental health conditions are rare in medical students.' This is not the case. In fact, research shows that medical students may have higher instances of mental health conditions compared to those in similar areas of study.

'Mental health conditions are personal and do not concern the medical school.' Your medical school needs to know if you have a condition that may affect your performance. It will be able to support you and make adjustments to help you study.

'Once I'm a doctor, if I have a mental health condition, the GMC will automatically put me in their fitness to practise procedures.' The GMC is only interested when a doctor's mental illness puts patients at risk. The vast majority of doctors with mental health conditions are not a risk to patients. If a doctor understands their condition and seeks appropriate support, the GMC does not get involved. The GMC never removes doctors from the register solely because they have a mental health condition.

'Staff will treat me differently if they know I have a mental health condition.' Most staff will not know that you have a mental health condition. Those who do have a duty to support you.

'Once you have a mental health condition you can never fully recover.' This is not true. There are many different types of mental health conditions and many people make a full recovery from them.

'There will be no benefit to me if I tell my medical school about my mental health condition.' This is not true. Your medical school will be able to put in place processes to support you with the course and will be able to put you in contact with services that can help you.

'The GMC will refuse to grant me provisional registration if I have a mental health condition.' This is not true. The GMC only refuses registration if it believes your condition would put patients at risk. Where an applicant understands their condition and asks for appropriate help and support, the GMC will grant registration.

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