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Vexatious Complaints, the GMC agree with PACA.

The GMC Fitness to Practise Committee has now acknowledged shortcomings, pointed out by PACA, in GMC procedures relating to complaints involving child protection. Following a Freedom of Information request, PACA has now discovered that the GMC plans to change its procedures.

The GMC acknowledged that they currently have no power to deal with serial or patently vexatious complainants, and that this may create unfairness for individual doctors who are either the specific target of a vexatious complainant or the random target of a serial complainant. Such circumstances are well recognised in Child Protection work, where some perpetrators of child abuse try and avoid responsibility for their actions by criticising the professionals involved.

The GMC has commented 'the current rules do not provide us with the flexibility to deal as effectively as we would like with serial complaints or complaints that are clearly vexatious. Although such complaints are relatively uncommon, they can be very resource intensive and are unfair to doctors.' At a meeting of the Fitness to Practice Committee in November 2008, GMC members agreed to pursue a change to their rules to allow them to reject serial or patently vexatious complaints.

A PACA spokesperson said 'We are extremely pleased that the GMC has responded constructively to our reasoned arguments about the particular circumstances of complaints in Child Protection. Whilst we are in general highly supportive of the work of the GMC in maintaining professional standards to promote patient safety, we feel that the needs of children for protection were previously being overlooked. '

Doctors involved in this work may find themselves caught between the interests of parents and children, and may find themselves the subject of complaint by aggrieved parents who have been implicated in child abuse. As we see from the tragedy of cases like Victoria Climbié and others since, if children are to be properly protected, then professionals must be able to voice and act on reasonably held concerns without fear of being accused of malpractice. This GMC decision is a major step forward and we applaud them for it. '

Further information and comment is available from PACA via

www.paca.org.uk