

**Meeting Notes**

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Regulating doctors  
Ensuring good medical practice

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**Date:** 18 June 2009

**Venue:** Portcullis House

**Attendees:** Norman Lamb MP, Lib Dem Shadow Health Secretary  
Andrew Forth, Parliamentary Researcher to Norman Lamb  
Paul Philip  
Laura Nelson

1. Paul Philip outlined the GMC's four key functions. He provided statistics for the number of complaints against doctors that the GMC receives and explained that this has risen considerably since the mid 1990s. He suggested some reasons why this might have occurred, such as medical scandals and changes in the doctor / patient relationship.
2. Norman Lamb mentioned that his sister is a GP and that she has had a complaint made against her to the GMC, which was later dismissed, so he is acutely aware of the stress that this causes doctors.
3. Paul outlined the three different types of complaints that the GMC receives: a) no relevance to the GMC ie no patient safety implications, b) referred to the employer and c) appropriate for the GMC to investigate. Norman Lamb asked how good PCTs are at following up on complaints that we refer to them; Paul replied that it varies enormously.
4. Paul set out the chronology of the **Dr Jane Barton** case and explained that the police had refused to provide details of the case to the GMC because this would jeopardise their criminal investigation. Norman Lamb said that he could see that there is a problem but understands that it is not the GMC at fault. He asked if there should be a new power for the GMC to require the police to provide evidence. Paul explained that the police would argue that using the same witnesses for the GMC investigation and the police investigation would compromise the latter.
5. Norman Lamb asked if the PCT could have suspended Dr Barton. Paul said they could have done and it is not uncommon for a PCT not to take action because it is waiting for the GMC do that for them.
6. Norman Lamb asked about the **delay** in cases coming before the GMC as he had frequently heard that this is a problem. On the cost of suspended doctors he

asked if this was due to PCTs not moving quickly enough or the GMC's processes being too slow.

7. Paul said that he accepts that there are problems but that 90% of cases are heard within 15 months. He said that the GMC is currently consulting on ways to hold the defence to account to minimise delays.

8. Paul explained the reasoning behind the introduction of **revalidation**. Norman Lamb said he believes it is a sensible policy and asked what the BMA's view is. Paul said that privately they raise strong concerns that revalidation will be too bureaucratic for doctors and will get in the way of looking after patients, but that this is difficult for them to say publicly.

9. Norman Lamb asked about the removal of the GMC's **adjudication function**. Paul outlined the timetable and explained that the individual regulators can decide if they want to transfer their adjudication functions to OHPA. Norman Lamb expressed his surprise at this arrangement.

10. Norman Lamb said that the *Independent of Sunday* journalist Nina Lakhani had complained that senior people at the GMC were also heavily involved with the **BMA**. Paul said that there are two doctors out of twelve on the Council who are affiliated with the BMA – 2 out of a total of 24 members and he does not believe that they hold undue influence.

11. Norman Lamb also raised concerns that **ethnic minority doctors** are treated differently to white middle class doctors. Paul said that the GMC is currently conducting research into this area as overseas doctors are over represented in complaints coming from the NHS and police but not via patients. He said it is possible that white middle class doctors are less likely to be referred to the GMC in the first place.

12. Paul suggested **regular catch up meetings** which Norman Lamb agreed would be helpful – approximately every 6 months.

### **Actions**

- Laura to send a copy of the White Paper *Trust, Assurance and Safety* to Norman Lamb's office.
- Laura to liaise with his office to arrange a future meeting to include Archy Kirkwood.