

NMC Parliamentary briefing for Norman Lamb MP - Fitness to Practice organisational improvements February 2010

- 1 The NMC is the largest healthcare regulatory body in the world, with over 670,000 nurses and midwives on the register.
- 2 At any one time, the NMC deals with around 2,500 fitness to practise cases.
- 3 Cases can be extremely complex, involving detailed investigation and analysis of evidence. The NMC often has to work alongside the police and other regulators in a co-ordinated fashion. Cases may involve large numbers of witnesses, whose availability can impact on the scheduling of panel hearings, especially where they are required to leave a clinical setting to give evidence.
- 4 In 2008 the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) published a special report on the NMC, commissioned by the then Minister of State for Health Services. CHRE found that the NMC was fulfilling its statutory duties but that it was not meeting the standards of performance that could reasonably have been expected by the public.
- 5 Since then, the NMC has appointed a new Director of Fitness to Practise and worked with the CHRE and other stakeholders including; the Royal College of Nursing; Royal College of Midwives; Unite; Unison; the four UK Chief Nursing Officers; Council of Deans for Health, among others, to design and deliver a comprehensive action plan to address the areas of concern raised in the report. The action plan was published in July 2008.
- 6 Following a year implementing the changes laid out in the action plan, CHRE published their 2008/9 performance review of all of the healthcare regulators and concluded that, in respect of the NMC:

“We consider that it has improved significantly in the areas of identified weakness and are satisfied with the NMC’s progress. Furthermore, it has achieved this without seeing performance suffer in its areas of relative strength: standards and registration... The [new] Director of Fitness to Practise has demonstrated strong leadership and driven both process and cultural change within the department. We recognise that the NMC has made good progress in addressing the areas of concern identified in our report. However, we are pleased that the NMC acknowledges that there is still room for improvement.”
- 7 At the time of the special report the CHRE noted that the average age of cases closed at panel hearings was 29 months. The average age is now 13 months.

- 8 The percentage of cases being completed within 15 months (a measure used by a number of regulators) was 53 percent at the time of the report. It is now 67 percent. Our target is to reach 75 percent in this financial year and 90 percent of by the end of the next financial year.
- 9 Substantial focus has also been placed on customer service and this has been improved in tandem with case progression. The improvements were recognised in the 2008/9 performance review:
- “We are also aware that improvements are being made to the efficiency of case progression. This is the result of a number of factors including better monitoring of cases, improved service level agreements with the NMC’s external [investigators], additional staff and a redesign of fitness to practise processes.”*
- 10 Since the publication of the 2008/9 CHRE performance review, other measures have been taken to improve our performance, including the introduction of an electronic case management system; letter writing procedures and content has been placed under constant review; and, the small number of remaining ‘legacy’ cases (those outstanding cases inherited from our predecessor body, the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting, are now reviewed bi-monthly by the Chief Executive and Executive Management Board to ensure that progress is made.
- 11 In recent months the NMC has also taken a much more pro-active role toward professional healthcare regulation, to safeguard patient safety and public wellbeing. The investigations of midwifery supervision and training placements at the Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, is an example of this proactive approach. As are the new memoranda of understanding (MOUs) being drawn up with the Care Quality Commission and the equivalent systems regulators in Northern Ireland and Scotland.
- 12 The NMC will be creating two new positions within the organisation to work solely on the co-ordination of pro-active investigations where there have been instances of chronic clinical failure, as experienced in Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.
- 13 We are also tackling head-on, regulatory issues such as the regulation of advanced nurse practitioners, how nurses and midwives can raise and escalate concerns at work, and the pan-UK regulation of healthcare support workers.
- 14 The NMC has made many significant organisational improvements since April 2008 and remains committed to making further improvements in both case progression and customer service. A link to the CHRE 2009 Performance Review can be found here:

http://www.chre.org.uk/img/pics/library/090702_Performance_Review_Report_2008-09.pdf

Further information

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