

GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL

*Protecting patients,
guiding doctors*

GMC Guidance *Confidentiality: Protecting and Providing Information*

We fully support the work of cancer registries and of other research, epidemiology and surveillance, which is vital in protecting and enhancing the public health. We also believe that patients' privacy and autonomy should generally be respected, and that systems for seeking consent, and for protecting privacy, through anonymisation or similar measures, should be adopted whenever that it is practicable. In some cases the current administrative and computer systems for disclosing or accessing identifiable data about patients for epidemiology and research prevent doctors from following our guidance on confidentiality published in September 2000.

We have accepted assurances from the UK Health Departments that systems for protecting patient confidentiality will be implemented as soon as practicable. In the light of those assurances, we have agreed that the practical difficulties which doctors' face in seeking consent to disclosures ahead of the implementation of new systems will be taken into account if complaints about disclosures are made to the GMC.

We are revising our guidance *Confidentiality: Protecting and Providing Information* to reflect the new legal position in England and Wales, when Regulations are passed under the Health and Social Care Act 2001. We propose to reissue our guidance to co-incide with the implementation of the first Regulations. We will also be publishing additional advice and guidance in a booklet of *Frequently Asked Questions*, which we will up-date regularly as Regulations under the Act are passed or withdrawn, and to reflect other topical issues.