Fitness for registration – a guide for medical students

You will need to answer questions that relate to your fitness to practise when applying for registration. This is to satisfy Council that:

- you can communicate effectively as a PGY1 doctor
- you can communicate effectively in, and comprehend, English
- your fitness to practise is not adversely affected by criminal convictions, health conditions (mental or physical), university or other professional disciplinary action or investigations
- you will not endanger the health or safety of members of the public.

This is specified by section 16 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCAA).

Similar questions are also asked when doctors renew their practising certificates.

Failure to declare the required information could jeopardise you obtaining registration. You must answer honestly – the HPCAA allows for considerable penalties (up to $10,000) for false declarations and misrepresentations.

All disclosures are reviewed with more information sought if needed – most applications proceed with minimal review.

If you are concerned about the contents of this page and any events that may need to be declared in future when applying for registration, you should speak with the dean of your medical school or contact the Council directly.

You can click on the below headings for more information:

- Health conditions – mental and physical conditions
- Convictions
- University disciplinary order
- Professional disciplinary proceedings

Health conditions – mental and physical

Safe practice means:

- making safe judgments
- demonstrating the level of skill and knowledge required for safe practice
- behaving appropriately
- not risking infecting patients with whom you come into contact
- not acting in ways that impact adversely on patient safety.

If you have a health condition (mental or physical) we need to know to what extent, if any, it impacts on your ability to practise. If there are potential risks for your practice, we need to be assured on how these can be managed with appropriate support, ongoing treatment, management and so on.

Relevant conditions

Any condition that may impair your ability to practise, such as:

- alcohol or drug use disorders
- mental health conditions
- a temporary stress reaction
- an infection with a transmissible major viral infection
- medical conditions including significant visual or hearing impairments, progressive conditions, brain injury and so on.

What type of conditions do not meet the threshold for disclosure?

- short-lived conditions which respond quickly to rest or treatment, and from which a full recovery is made
- medical problems that won't affect your ability to practise as a doctor.

What information needs to be provided?

If you answer 'Yes', please send the following information:

- the actual diagnosis you have been given, with a brief history
- a brief outline of your treatment, its efficacy, and relevant management, including what's in place to assist your recovery, or to manage any chronic, progressive, or relapsing and remitting conditions
- how the condition has impacted your ability to fulfil your study requirements, as well as your practice during your trainee intern year. If there are potential future impacts, any plan to manage these is relevant
- any potential risk for patients
- any professional advice you've received relating to your fitness to be registered and to practise.

You'll also need to send us the name and contact details of your treating practitioner(s), outlining any involvement of the university/medical school, and what supports you have in place.

Your information should ideally be supported by a report from your treating doctor(s) that covers the above bullet points. This will be at your cost.

There is also provision on the application form for you to consent to Council's Health Case Manager contacting your treating practitioner(s) for any clarification or further information.

Where do I send my information?

Email: reghealth@mcnz.org.nz.

Jo Hawken is the Health Case Manager here at Council who will follow-up with you about the information you have provided.

Please feel free to contact her in advance with any questions you may have. She can be contacted at 0800 286 801 extn 769 or jhawken@mcnz.org.nz / reghealth@mcnz.org.nz.

What is the decision-making process?

Your application will be on hold while your health disclosure and related information are reviewed by Jo. She will determine whether additional information or advice is required to establish the extent, if any, your ability to practise might be affected. She will also liaise, where necessary, with Council's Health Manager or the Health Committee Chair.

On rare occasions, an independent assessment (eg occupational, neuropsychological, medical or psychiatric) may be needed. This could apply if the condition is ongoing, is remitting or relapsing, or if you haven't been well engaged in treatment or don't have a robust relapse management plan.

Otherwise, the treatment reports provided are usually sufficient to establish your fitness, with or without supports.

Your application will then proceed in the usual way – as soon as your fitness to practise is confirmed.

Council's Health Committee

The Health Committee (the Committee) is a sub-committee of Council. One of its roles is to advise on fitness for registration if applicants have health conditions that have the capacity to impact on their practice.

Some decisions are delegated to Council's Health Manager and Health Case Managers. The Committee oversees these by reviewing summarised information showing each applicant's name, the diagnosis given, advice/information received, decisions made and any proposed follow up.

Occasionally, all of an applicant's information needs to be provided to the Committee so it can advise Council on that applicant's fitness for registration and to practise. You will be informed if this step is being taken. You can make submissions in writing or attend the meeting if you wish.

The profiles of all Council members can be viewed on Council's website. Current Health Committee members are Professor Ron Paterson (Chair), Dr Stephen Child, Dr Alexandra Muthu, and Professor Marie Bismark. The Chair of Council, Dr Kenneth Clark, is an ex-officio member.

Conflicts of interest

If you believe you have a conflict of interest with a Council member, please let Jo know. She will discuss with you how it will be managed.

Who else at the Council can see my health information?

Information held by the Health Team is secured and only accessible to the Team, Council's registrar and deputy registrar, the CE and Deputy CE.

If your information has been considered by Health Committee members, this will be minuted. Council then receives the minutes. These are in summary form and contain some of the health information you have given that relates to your fitness to practise, such as brief notification/disclosure information, key points from any reports/submissions received, the course of any illness/recovery, any issues around fitness, and points from any independent advice/recommendations received that are relevant to fitness to practise.

Liaison with prevocational educational supervisors or the Chief Medical Officer in the hospital you are placed in (or equivalent authority in a community-based attachment)

Sometimes a new doctor can benefit from additional support, or protected time for treatment/review appointments. This could be because they have residual symptoms of a condition, for example a brain injury, a transmissible major viral infection that may preclude exposure prone procedures, a relapsing/remitting condition, or a partially treated condition.

The new doctor may be asked to have a discussion with the prevocational educational supervisor assigned to them. In some instances, there may be more formal communication from the Council or Health Committee through the Health Case Manager. This won't occur without your knowledge.

The rationale for this is to ensure that the receiving employer has all the necessary information it needs to assist new doctors with a smooth transition from medical school to the role of a practising doctor. For example, the employer can take health issues into account when assigning doctors to clinical attachments.

How does the Privacy Act 2020 and the Health Information Privacy Code 2020 apply to personal health information acquired and held by the Council?

Council is an 'agency' under the Act and the Code. The information we ask for is consistent with our statutory purpose to determine if a doctor is fit for registration.

To read more on ways in which we may use this information, go to '*About us'* on Council's website.

There is also more information on our website about the Health Committee's role and approach when registered doctors have a condition affecting their ability to practise.

Convictions

As the Council is not directly informed if students break the law, it is your responsibility, and in your best interest to tell the Council of any convictions.

If you've ticked 'Yes' to having a conviction, here are some examples of the type of information you'll need to provide with your registration application:

- a summary of facts or court documentation
- a written reflection on the conviction - in your own words
- any other information that you think may be useful.

The information you provide will be considered by Council's Registrar.

University disciplinary order

It is your responsibility, and in your best interest to tell the Council of any conduct findings or pending investigations.

Under the HPCAA a person in charge of an educational programme in New Zealand, for example a dean of a medical school, who believes that a student who is completing a course would be unable to perform the functions required because of some health condition (mental or physical) must promptly give the Registrar written notice of all the circumstances.

If you've ticked 'Yes' to being subject to a university disciplinary order here are some examples of the type of information you should provide with your registration application:

- a written summary of the matter in your own words
- official documentation from you University regarding the investigation and outcome
- any other information that you think may be useful.

The information you provide will be considered by Council's Registrar.

Professional disciplinary proceedings

It is your responsibility, and in your best interest to tell the Council of any conduct findings or pending investigations from any other professional bodies.

If you've ticked 'Yes' to being subject to a professional disciplinary proceeding here are some examples of the type of information you should provide with your registration application:

- a written summary of the matter in your own words
- official documentation from the professional body regarding the proceeding and outcome
- any other information that you think may be useful.

The information you provide will be considered by Council's Registrar.