

PS02/17

Guidance on use of the title ‘Consultant Psychiatrist’

POSITION STATEMENT

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This Position Statements was sanctioned by the Council of the Royal College of Psychiatrists on 12 April 2017.

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The Royal College of Psychiatrists is a charity registered in England and Wales (228636) and in Scotland (SC038369).

In recent times the College has been contacted by members because they have been concerned over doctors who use the title 'Consultant Psychiatrist' (mainly, but not exclusively, in the independent sector) but who are not eligible to be appointed to the medical Consultant grade within the NHS, as they are not on the Specialist Register maintained by the General Medical Council (GMC).

The College, through its Invited Review Service, surveyed Medical Directors and Faculty Chairs about the issue. The responses suggested that this was not an infrequent occurrence, but also revealed other concerns about specialist job titles. The findings were presented to Council, who asked the Registrar to establish a task and finish group to develop College guidance for employers.

The Council of the Royal College of Psychiatrists has agreed this guidance. It represents our advice to employers, members of the College and the profession on good practice in the use of clinical job titles.

The regulatory framework

The law is clear on the question of individuals who misrepresent themselves as registered medical practitioners (see Appendix 1). Such legislation has existed for almost 200 years, and is designed to protect the public from placing their trust in persons who do not have appropriate training or expertise to treat them safely.

The GMC's guidance Good Medical Practice makes clear the responsibility of individual medical practitioners to work within their competence and to involve another doctor when this is in the patient's best interests.

The UK's hospital inspectorates and regulators expect provider organisations to ensure that they employ doctors who have appropriate training and expertise to carry out their work.

Why does the title 'Consultant Psychiatrist' matter?

The use of title Consultant is not subject to statutory regulation. It is a title that is used in a wide variety of roles outside of healthcare. In the NHS, there are Consultant grades for a variety of non-medical healthcare professions. In the case of medical staff, they can only be appointed to the NHS Consultant grade if they are on the GMC's Specialist Register. This indicates that the doctor is competent to practise as an autonomous specialist without supervision by another doctor. Although there is widespread confusion over NHS professional roles and titles, the concept of a 'Consultant' (meaning, in effect, the specialist doctor in charge of a patient's care) is well understood by the general public.

NHS assessment and treatment for mental health problems, learning disability and substance misuse are commonly contracted through private sector or charitable providers. The Royal College of Psychiatrists believes that it is self-evident that NHS patients should receive care and treatment from appropriately trained doctors irrespective of the nature of the provider, and that the status of practitioners should be evident to patients, families and carers through consistent and proper use of job titles. Furthermore, there is no legitimate reason why patients who choose to use independent sector services should not enjoy the same degree of transparency with regard to the qualifications, training and expertise of the doctors that they see.

The principles

All doctors using the title Consultant Psychiatrist:

- 1 Should be on the GMC's Specialist Register as a psychiatrist.
- 2 Should hold, or have previously held, a contract with the job title 'Consultant Psychiatrist'.
- 3 Should be revalidated, relicensed, subject to appraisal and in good standing for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) with the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Recommendations

- 1 The title 'Consultant Psychiatrist' should only be used by doctors who are included on the GMC's Specialist Register and who hold, or have held, a contract with this specific job title.
- 2 Doctors who are not on the Specialist Register but who are permanently employed in non-training grades in psychiatry should hold posts entitled 'Specialty Doctor in Psychiatry'. See Appendix 2.
- 3 Individuals who work in psychiatry but who are not registered with the GMC should work under the direct supervision of a substantive Consultant Psychiatrist. Physician Associates working alongside Consultant Psychiatrists should make it clear to patients that they are not medical practitioners. See Appendix 3.
- 4 The title Locum Consultant Psychiatrist should be restricted to temporary appointments of doctors who are on the Specialist Register.
- 5 Where a doctor is working temporarily in a Consultant role but is not on the Specialist Register, (a) they should be under the direct supervision of a Consultant Psychiatrist and (b) they should use the title Acting Consultant Psychiatrist.
- 6 If an organisation employs as an Acting Consultant Psychiatrist a doctor who is not on the Specialist Register, and this employment lasts for more than 6 months, it is expected that the organisation will support them through the process to gain a Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR).

- 7 The Royal College of Psychiatrists recommends that it is acceptable for doctors who are on the Specialist Register to work across specialties as a Consultant Psychiatrist subject to appropriate experience and training. Attaining Specialist Registration implies that the doctor is able to adapt to new techniques and working environments throughout their career. Nonetheless, there is an obligation on such doctors and their employers to ensure that they have adequate skills for their role. It will often be necessary for employers to support further training under these circumstances.
- 8 This guidance applies to all settings where patients are treated at the expense of the NHS, including independent and charitable health organisations.
- 9 The guidance applies to all specialties, including substance misuse services.
- 10 We recommend that non-NHS providers should follow this guidance for patients who are not publically funded, in order to avoid inequities and misunderstandings.
- 11 It is appropriate for psychiatrists who have held a substantive post as a Consultant to continue using the title as self-employed practitioners provided that they have a licence to practise, continue to take part in all activities necessary for appraisal and are in good standing with the College for CPD.

Regional Advisers in Psychiatry can offer further advice to employers and doctors on the interpretation of this guidance.

Information on the Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR) is available at: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/traininpsychiatry/corespecialtytraining/cesr.aspx>

Appendices

Appendix 1

Medical Act 1983 – The General Medical Council: the law with regard to ‘passing off’ as a medical practitioner.

‘49A. Penalty for pretending to hold a licence to practise

(1) If a person who does not hold a licence to practise -

(a) holds himself out as having such a licence; or

(b) engages in conduct calculated to suggest that he has such a licence,

he shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.’

Appendix 2

The NHS *Terms and Conditions of Service for Specialty Doctors – England* (2008) states:

'Entry Criteria to the Grade

1. A doctor appointed to this grade:
 - shall have full registration with the General Medical Council; and
 - shall have completed at least four years' full-time postgraduate training (or its equivalent gained on a part-time or flexible basis) at least two of which will be in a specialty training programme in a relevant specialty or as a fixed term specialty trainee in a relevant specialty; or
 - shall have equivalent experience and competencies.

Appendix 3

According to the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), Physician Associates are 'collaborative healthcare professionals with a generalist medical education, who work alongside doctors, GPs and surgeons providing medical care as an integral part of the multidisciplinary team. Physician associates are dependent practitioners working with a dedicated supervisor, but are able to work independently with appropriate support'.

The Faculty of Physician Associates of the RCP specifies the training required including:

- (a) Completed an undergraduate degree in a life science
- (b) Complete a 2-year, full-time, intensive postgraduate course in medical science and clinical reasoning; this consists of 50% theory and 50% practice. It includes over 1400 hours of clinical placement experience in both acute and community settings, starting at an early point of the course. This training is based on the *Competence and Curriculum Framework for the Physician Assistant* (Department of Health 2006, revised 2012).
- (c) Students must pass both their university programme and the UK Physician Associate national examination to be able to work as a Physician Associate. Once qualified, Physician Associates must:
 - I. maintain 50 hours of CPD each year
 - II. sit a recertification examination every 6 years.

References

Department of Health (2012). *Competence and Curriculum Framework for the Physician Assistant*. Department of Health (available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/544f552de4b0645de79fbe01/t/557f1c1ae4b0edab35dd92cf/1434393626361/CCF-27-03-12-for-PAMVR.pdf>).

General Medical Council (2013) *Good Medical Practice*. GMC (available at: http://www.gmc-uk.org/static/documents/content/GMP_.pdf).

National Health Service (2008). *Terms and Conditions of Service for Specialty Doctors – England*. NHS Employers (available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/-/media/files/pdfs/practical%20advice%20at%20work/contracts/sasengspecialtytcs.pdf?la=en>).