

RCPsych NI November 2023 Response to Request for Our Perspective as part of the Department of Health Review into Maintaining High Professional Standards in the Modern HPSS: A framework for the handling of concerns about Doctors and Dentists in the HPSS

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The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the statutory body responsible for the supervision of the training and accreditation of Psychiatrists in the UK and for providing guidelines and advice regarding the treatment, care and prevention of mental and behavioural disorders. Among its principal aims are to improve the outcomes for those with mental illness and to improve the mental health of individuals, families and communities.

The College has approximately 440 members in Northern Ireland, including Doctors in training. These Doctors provide the backbone of the local Psychiatric service, offering inpatient, day patient and outpatient treatment, as well as specialist care and consultation across a large range of settings.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this Review. As a Regional and National source of expertise in the assessment and management of mental illness, our Members have a direct interest in the subject matter of this Review.

The replies we have provided herein are given on behalf of our Devolved Council.

1. Please advise as to the extent of involvement your organisation has had with MHPS cases since 2017.

RCPsych NI is a membership organisation representing Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland - and we are not privy to and do not carry figures for the number of our Members, Affiliates or Fellows who have been involved in MHPS cases.

2. Do you feel there is a need to have a Northern Ireland Framework for managing concerns that sits in addition to and alongside local Trust policies and procedures?

It is important that there should not be a "postcode lottery" for Clinicians - and that if they are subject to MHPS, the same robust, fair, safe and equitable process be followed throughout Northern Ireland. A single Framework will support this.

3. What are the issues (as perceived by your organisation) with the current MHPS process(es)?

RCPsych NI wishes to contribute a mental health perspective to this Review and will limit our contribution solely to that domain. It is vital that Clinicians' practice be safe, effective and evidence based - and MHPS is important in ensuring Patients are not put at risk by Doctors who may not be fit to practice. However, an MHPS process which is overly adversarial, or which does not undertake its investigations in a psychologically safe manner, is one which could open up risk of harm to the Clinician being investigated. In this regard, process length needs to be carefully examined and shortened. It is also notable that some MHPS processes have been opened following minimal fact-finding, leading to stress and anxiety for Clinicians, who were subsequently informed at the end of the process that a more robust initial informal process would have cleared them immediately.

4. How might they be improved?

- ***A focus on the wellbeing of the Clinician being investigated, with adequate support from within the Trust/HSCNI - and recognising the Trust will have a duty of care to its Employee***
- ***Ensuring the process is psychologically safe, while remaining robust***
- ***Ensuring informal approaches are initially used and that proceeding to formal processes is done only after a thorough informal process has been followed***
- ***Ensuring that Staff wellbeing, as well as Patient wellbeing, is held at the core of this process - and that MHPS is not in itself allowed to cause avoidable harm to Clinicians***