



Issues affecting doctors who have been suspended

Information for those dealing with suspended doctors and their families

Specific factors come into play when a doctor is suspended. The following is a checklist to sensitise those dealing with suspended doctors to their particular needs and to assist in directing them to appropriate help. The suspended doctor may not, subsequent to suspension, be held liable for any wrongdoing but often feels in a state of already being judged guilty. There are costs to society as well as to the individual doctor when a doctor is suspended. The following factors may be present in a doctor going through suspension and those dealing with doctors who have been suspended, or where there is a threat of suspension, should be aware of these issues.

- Loss of confidence and feeling deskilled because of time out of clinical work
- Sense of shame
- Feel powerless to challenge the system because although they feel a victim of the system they also feel under attack
- Confusion – may not know why they have been suspended and therefore not able to tackle problem in any positive way.
- Loss of 'self' – feeling of being professionally and personally destroyed.
- Lack of purpose
- Not allowed contact with any colleagues/friends within the hospital or surgery – no-one to validate feelings. Being away from work has been described as a bereavement and doctor feeling in a state of suspense and anxiety
- Often difficulties not knowing how to structure time – lack of structure makes doctor more introspective and dwell on problems
- Cost to doctor's mental health that above may cause
- Feeling that even if exonerated the stigma of suspension will remain with them throughout their career
- Suspended doctors are in need of additional support and those around them should recognise the added sense of isolation they have and try to ensure that maximum support is given both in terms of their case and also with regard to financial and social issues as far as these can be addressed
- Research has highlighted increased psychiatric morbidity and mortality in this group.

Where to go for help

Doctors will initially need advice from their defence organisation and/or BMA regional services for medico-legal advice and representation if necessary. Although some doctors may need support from their GP or psychiatric help, often there will be no overt medical problem. The doctor may still feel confused and bewildered by the situation in which they find themselves. In this case it may well be helpful for the doctor to speak to a counsellor or doctor adviser to support them and perhaps give them a sense of perspective on the situation whilst also reinforcing the doctor's sense of self worth.

BMA Counselling and Doctors Advisory Service – 08459 200 169