Health self-certification guidance

Introduction: Your health and fitness to practise

1. This guidance explains the circumstances in which you need to tell us about any relevant health condition(s), so please read it carefully.
2. The General Dental Council (GDC) has a statutory duty under ss15 and 36C of the Dentists Act 1984 to be satisfied that a person is in good health, both physically and mentally, before they are registered.
3. Putting patients' interests first is the first principle in our Standards. To do this, you need to take into account your own health and wellbeing.
4. If you can show that you are properly managing your health condition, there should be no impact on your application to join the register.
5. Although we do not provide a non-exhaustive list of relevant health conditions, we do provide some examples within the guidance notes on the application form. We need to know about any risk your health condition may pose to patient safety or to your ability to do your job safely, not so much about the condition itself.
6. This may vary from person to person, and may also be affected by the impact of your condition, the help you may be receiving, and how much insight you have into its effect on your practice.
7. We recognise that your ability to work safely can be enhanced by the support network you have, whether that was your dental school/training provider, at work or at home from the clinician(s) treating you.
8. Throughout this guidance we use the term 'health condition' to mean an illness, injury or disability/impairment either physical or mental.

What do the General Dental Council Standards for the Dental Team say about registrants' health?

9. The General Dental Council (GDC) Standards for the Dental Team sets out the standards of conduct, performance and ethics that govern you as a dental professional.
10. Registrants have an individual responsibility to behave professionally and follow these principles at all times.
11. The standards set out what registrants must do. If you do not meet these standards, you may be removed from our register and not be able to work as a dental professional.
12. In regard to registrants' health, the following applies:
    a. Standard 9.2.1 states "If you know, or suspect, that patients may be at risk because of your health, behaviour or professional performance, you must consult a suitably qualified colleague immediately and follow advice on how to put the interests of patients first."
    b. Standard 9.2.2 states "You must not rely on your own assessment of the risk you pose to patients. You should seek occupational health advice or other appropriate advice as soon as possible."

Deciding if you need to tell us about your health condition

13. As part of the self-declaration in your application form, you are required to tell us about any health condition which may affect or has affected the safety of patients you may treat and/or those you work with and/or your ability to do your job safely.
14. To help you answer this question, you should consider the below statements. Although not an exhaustive list, if any of the following statements, read in conjunction with the definitions, apply to you, you need to tell us about your health condition:

"I have, or have had a health condition(s) which required me to change one or more aspects of my dental/DCP training, or practice, to enable me to work safely with patients or to continue my training."

'Change' in this context means an advised or requested change to your practice, training or study. This could include (but is not limited to): adaptations to equipment, additional support or changes to your working arrangements such as less than full time work. The change could be required or recommended by your dental school/training provider, employer, occupational health service, treating physician, or you might have requested it yourself.

"I have, or have had, a health condition(s) which has resulted in an interruption to, or breaks in, my practice or studies, including retaking any part of my course or assessments/exams."

An 'interruption or break' in this context means one or more breaks in practice, study or clinical placements due to a physical or mental health condition.

For students, this is likely to have resulted in the individual becoming 'out of step' with their peers, or having to retake any part of their studies or training or assessment or exams, because of their health condition.

For established registrants, this is likely to have resulted in the individual having taken a break from, or ended their employment or interrupted their training. If your physical or mental health condition was not a reason for an interruption or break, we do not need to know about it.

"I have, or have had, a health condition(s), which has resulted in conditions being placed in relation to my practice, training or registration."

'Conditions' in this context are conditions placed on the individual's practice, which allows them to practise subject to certain restrictions (such as not performing a particular procedure).

"I have, or have had, a health condition(s) which has been considered under fitness to practise proceedings whether in the UK or overseas."

'Fitness to practise proceedings' means a process to decide whether an individual's fitness to practise is impaired, arising from concerns about their ability to practise safely and effectively.

For students, this includes your dental school/training provider's fitness to practise processes, or any other dental school/training provider investigation into the impact of your health or ability to complete the course.

For established registrants, this may have been proceedings undertaken by your employer, by the GDC or a dental regulator overseas.

"I have, or have had, a health condition(s) and I am applying to restore to the register."

This is applicable to those who previously held registration with the GDC but have been off the register for a period of time and are now applying to restore their name.

If you decided to leave the register initially due to a physical or mental health condition, or a condition has emerged independently whilst you have been off the register, you will need to provide details.

"Is there anything about your physical or mental health which could prevent you meeting the principles in our Standards?"

If you answer 'yes' to any of the above statements or questions, you will need to tell us about the physical or mental health condition when you complete the Health and Self-declaration section of your application.

Once we have your information, we will decide whether your health condition affects your fitness to practise. Before doing so, we may check some of the information you have given to us (for example, confirm with your dental school/training provider or employer that there have been no interruptions to your study or practice because of your health), and in a small number of cases, ask for more information from you or a third party (for example, information from an occupational health practitioner or a doctor who is treating you).

Is a disability considered to be a health condition for the purposes of this declaration?

15. The important thing is whether your health condition impacts on your ability to work safely with patients or affects your ability to carry out your job. In many cases, registrants with a disability or health condition can practise safely.
16. If, as a result of any health condition, you have answered 'yes' to any of the statements above, you should tell us about it when you complete the Health and Self-declaration section of your application, relating to fitness to practise and health matters.

If I tell you about a health condition, what other information do I need to send with my application?

17. When you make your application, we will ask you to give us details of relevant health condition(s) if you answer yes to either of the health related questions in the self-declaration. We will let you know, once we have assessed your application, whether we need more information from you, or from a third party, or whether we need to see any documents. Please quote your GDC reference number in all correspondence.
18. We may ask for more information in the form of a report from your occupational health practitioner and/or any other medical practitioner who is treating you.

Who else might I need to tell about my health condition?

19. Please be aware that you have a separate duty to tell your employer about any health condition that may impact on your ability to practise. You should also discuss the issue with your indemnity provider.

If I have a health condition, will the GDC refuse to register me?

20. Having a health condition is not, in itself, a reason for us to refuse to grant registration. What we have a responsibility to determine is whether your health affects your fitness to practise. If you are unwell, even if the illness is serious, it does not necessarily mean that your fitness to practise will be impaired.
21. If the registrar is satisfied that you are correctly managing any relevant health condition, by taking steps which will avoid any risk to patients and will ensure you have the ability to perform your job safely, you will not be refused registration on health grounds.

Information that can be obtained from a third party

22. When you apply for registration the declaration on your application states that you consent that we can obtain further information from any medical practitioner who is treating you, if required.

If you want us to share information about your application with a third party

23. If you want us to share information with a third party (this might be your dental school/training provider, or employer) about what is happening with your application for registration, you will need to give us your written consent.

Confidentiality

24. We treat all matters relating to your health in the strictest confidence. We only share information with those who need it to deal with your application. That will usually be the GDC officer or caseworker dealing with your application and the registrar (the decision maker). If the registrar needs advice from an occupational health adviser[1], the relevant parts of your application will also be made available to the adviser.
25. GDC staff and our chosen occupational health adviser have all received comprehensive training on keeping confidential information (which includes information about your health) secure.

Making a decision on your application

26. We know how important a decision on your application for registration is to you, so we make decisions on applications as quickly as we can.
27. Where we can grant registration, we want to give you our decision as quickly as possible. You can help by:
    a. Giving us all the information we have asked for, promptly.
    b. Making your application in plenty of time.
28. Sometimes we do have to make the difficult decision to refuse applications. Where the decision is to refuse an application, we issue a detailed reason for the decision, and there is a right of appeal. If this happens to you, there is nothing to prevent you from making a further application and providing evidence that concerns identified in our decision have been fully addressed.

[1] The GDC currently contracts with Co-Health Ltd. to provide advice on health.

What factors do the GDC consider when deciding if my health condition affects my fitness to practise?

29. If you tell us about a relevant health condition we must decide whether it affects your fitness to practise. We take into account the following things:
    a. Does your health condition affect your judgement or your ability to care for patients and/or work safely?
    b. Have you sought independent advice and treatment for your condition from a suitably qualified independent healthcare professional?
    c. If appropriate, have you followed their advice for managing the condition, including taking prescribed medication and making changes to your practice, so that you can work safely with patients?
    d. If appropriate, have you told your employer or potential employer about your condition and about any adjustments you need so that you can work safely with patients?

What will happen if I don't tell you about a relevant health condition?

30. We recognise that it can be difficult to decide whether you need to tell us about a relevant health condition
31. It is important that you carefully consider the information in the guidance and, although not an exhaustive list, the statements and definitions in "Deciding if you need to tell us about your health condition".
32. If having read the guidance, you decide not to tell us about a relevant health condition, and we subsequently learn of the condition and conclude that the condition could impact on your fitness to practise, you may be subject to our fitness to practise procedures.
33. In reaching that conclusion we will take the following into account:
    a. Whether you gave a reasonable explanation for not telling us.
    b. Whether you made a deliberate decision to conceal information relevant to your fitness to practise or you were trying to mislead us.
    c. Whether you have insight into the effect of your condition, and are fully aware of the potential impact on your ability to work safely with patients.

Further information

34. For further information, please read the following documents:
    a. GDC Standards
    b. Department of Health – The Green Book
    c. Public Health England – The Management of HIV infected Healthcare Workers who perform exposure prone procedures
    d. Dental Schools Council – Medical and dental students: Health clearance for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV and Tuberculosis