

16 May 2003

Mr Henry Palin
Solicitor to the Inquiry
The Shipman Inquiry
Gateway House
Picadilly South
Manchester
M60 7LP

Dear Mr Palin

Doctors' fitness to practice and the role of the GMC

Thank you for your letter of 27 March requesting APIL's views on the above. Whilst you raise a number of important issues, we would like to concentrate on the extent to which adverse, or potentially adverse, information about a doctor's performance should be available to the bodies responsible for monitoring doctors' performance.

We believe that adverse and potentially adverse information about a doctor's performance should be collated and filed in one place. This information should be available to the monitoring bodies and should be considered during the appraisal and/or revalidation process. This exercise would, in our view, reduce the risk of harm to patients caused by either intentional or negligent behaviour. It would allow monitoring bodies to identify patterns of behaviour. One complaint would not necessarily give an indication of a doctor's fitness to practice but a series of proven or unproven complaints may do so.

We appreciate that some people may feel that it is unfair to keep records of, for example, unproven complaints or disciplinary proceedings. It is certainly important that this information should only be used carefully for the specific and limited purpose of assessing a doctor's fitness to practice. Patient safety is, however, paramount. Any information that could have a bearing on a doctor's performance and his fitness to practice should be available to the relevant monitoring bodies.

I hope that this is helpful but please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any further information in relation to our position.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Gwinnutt
Press & Parliamentary Manager