



Blood and Transplant

Human Resources Policies and Procedures

Managing Concerns about Medical Practitioners

UCD/HRO/Medical Concerns/046

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Introduction and scope of the document

This document provides a procedure for dealing with concerns about the professional and personal conduct and capability of a medical practitioner employed by NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), including where these concerns are the result of the practitioner's ill health. The document provides an assurance to medical practitioners employed within NHSBT that concerns about their and their colleagues' performance will be dealt with in a fair and equitable manner, and in line with the guidance provided to the rest of the NHS by the Department of Health (DoH). The document ensures those with a responsibility for managing medical practitioners have clear guidelines by which to proceed once a concern about a medical practitioner is brought to their attention.

This document should be read in conjunction with the following NHSBT policies and procedures:

- Equality and Diversity
- Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary
- Grievance
- Capability
- Raising a Matter of Concern (Whistleblowing)
- Attendance and Sickness Absence Management

However, this document takes precedence over the above policies unless otherwise stated in this document.

This document implements the framework set out in "Maintaining High Professional Standards In The Modern NHS: Doctors' and Dentists' Disciplinary Framework" and "A Framework For The Initial Handling Of Concerns About Doctors And Dentists In The NHS" HSC 2003/012

This policy and procedure replaces any previous NHSBT policies for dealing with concerns regarding medical practitioners, including the Disciplinary Procedure for NBS Medical Staff, and the following DoH circulars HC(90)9 – the guidelines for disciplinary procedures; HC(82)13 – Special Professional Panels ("the three wise men").

This is an agreement between NHSBT and Medical National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC) outlining the employer's procedure for handling concerns about doctors conduct and capability. This procedure may be amended to reflect any future national advice or guidance only by agreement with the NJNC. Where there is any conflict or lack of clarity, the existing national agreed guidance will take precedence.

Action when a Concern Arises

1 Introduction

1.1 The management of performance is a continuous process, which is intended to develop and improve the performance of all practitioners. Numerous ways exist in which concerns about a practitioner's performance can be identified; through which remedial and supportive action can be quickly taken before problems become serious or patients or donors harmed; and which need not necessarily require formal investigation or to resort to disciplinary policy.

1.2. Concerns about a doctor conduct or capability can come to light in a wide variety of ways, for example:

- Concerns expressed by other NHS professionals, health care managers, students and non-clinical staff;
- Review of performance against job plans, annual appraisal, revalidation

- Monitoring of data on performance and quality of care;
- Clinical governance, clinical audit and other quality improvement activities;
- Complaints from patients, donors, or relatives of patients and donors*
- Information from the regulatory bodies;
- Litigation following allegations of negligence;
- Information from the police or coroner;
- Court judgements.

* complaints from relatives of donors will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and where there are acceptable reasons why the donor is unable to make a complaint themselves.

- 1.3. Unfounded and malicious allegations can cause lasting damage to a doctor's reputation and career prospects. Therefore all allegations, including those made by relatives of patients/donors, or concerns raised by colleagues, must be properly investigated to verify the facts so that the allegations can be shown to be true or false.
- 1.4. Concerns about the capability of doctors in training should be considered initially as training issues and dealt with via the educational supervisor with close involvement of the postgraduate dean.
- 1.5. All **serious** concerns must be registered with the Chief Executive. S/he must ensure that a case manager is appointed. The Chair of the Board must designate a non-executive member to oversee the case and ensure that momentum is maintained. This role will be referred to as "the Designated Board Member". All concerns will be investigated quickly and appropriately. A clear audit route will be established for initiating and tracking the progress of the investigation, its costs and resulting action/s. The Medical & Research Director will work with the Director of Human Resources to decide the appropriate course of action in each case. The Medical & Research Director will act as the case manager in cases involving Associate Medical Directors, Clinical Directors and Consultants. The Medical & Research Director may delegate this role to a senior manager to oversee the case on his/her behalf. The Medical & Research Director is responsible for appointing a case investigator.

Note: When dealing with concerns about the Medical & Research Director who is practising medicine, then this will be referred to the Chief Executive who will appoint a case manager either from the Associate Medical Directors, Clinical Directors, or from outside the organisation and agree a case investigator with that person.

Exclusion

- 1.6. When **serious** concerns are raised about a practitioner, NHSBT will urgently consider whether it is necessary to place temporary restrictions on their practice. This might be to amend or restrict their clinical duties, obtain undertakings or provide for the exclusion of the practitioner from the workplace. Section 2 of this Policy sets out the procedures for this action.
- 1.7. At any point in the process where the case manager has reached the clear judgement that a practitioner is considered to be a serious potential danger to patients, donors or staff, that practitioner must be referred to the General Medical Council (GMC), whether or not the case has been referred to the National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS). Consideration should also be given to whether the issue of an alert letter should be requested.
- 1.8. The first task of the case manager is to identify the nature of the problem or concern and to assess the seriousness of the issue on the information available and the likelihood that it can be resolved without resort to formal procedures. This is a difficult

decision and should not be taken alone but in consultation with the Director of Human Resources and the Medical & Research Director and the NCAS.
<http://www.ncas.npsa.nhs.uk/home/>

- 1.9 The case manager should explore the potential problem with the NCAS to consider different ways of tackling it both informally and formally. The case manager should explore the possibility of the problem being about work systems rather than an individual's performance, or is wider problem needing the involvement of an outside body other than the NCAS.
- 1.10 The case manager should not automatically attribute an incident to the actions, failings or acts of an individual alone. Root-cause analyses of adverse events may be conducted as these frequently show that causes are more broadly based and can be attributed to systems or organisational failures, or demonstrate that they are untoward outcomes which could not have been predicted and are not the result of any individual or systems failure. Each will require appropriate investigation and remedial actions. The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) facilitates the development of an open and fair culture, which encourages doctors and other NHS staff to report adverse incidents and other near misses and the case manager should consider contacting the NPSA for advice about systems or organisational failures.
- 1.11 Having discussed the case with the NCAS and/or NPSA, the case manager must decide whether an informal approach can be taken to address the problem, or whether a formal investigation will be needed. Where an informal route is chosen the NCAS can still be involved until the problem is resolved.
- 1.12 Where it is decided that a more formal route needs to be followed (perhaps leading to conduct or capability proceedings) the Medical & Research Director (or nominated person) must, after discussion between the Chief Executive and Director of Human Resources, appoint an appropriately experienced or trained person as case investigator. The seniority of the case investigator will differ depending on the grade of practitioner involved in the allegation.
- 1.13 The case investigator**
- Is responsible for leading the investigation into any allegations or concerns about a practitioner, establishing the facts and reporting the findings;
 - Must formally involve a senior member of the medical staff where a question of clinical judgement is raised during the investigation process. (Where no other suitable senior doctor is employed by NHSBT a senior doctor from another NHS body should be approached);
 - Must ensure that safeguards are in place throughout the investigation so that breaches of confidentiality are avoided as far as possible. Patient/donor confidentiality needs to be maintained but any disciplinary panel will need to know the details of the allegations. It is the responsibility of the case investigator to judge what information needs to be gathered and how - within the boundaries of the law - that information should be gathered. The investigator may if appropriate approach the practitioner concerned to seek views on information that should be collected;
 - Must ensure that there are sufficient written statements collected to establish a case prior to a decision to convene any disciplinary panel, and on aspects of the case not covered by a written statement, ensure that oral evidence is given sufficient weight in the investigation report;

- Must ensure that a written record is kept of the investigation, the conclusions reached and the course of action agreed by the Director of Human Resources with the Medical & Research Director;
- Must assist the designated Board member in reviewing the progress of the case.

The Investigation

- 1.14 The case investigator does not make the decision on what action should be taken nor whether the employee should be excluded from work and may not be a member of any disciplinary or appeal panel relation to the case.
- 1.15 The practitioner concerned must be informed in writing by the case manager, as soon as it has been decided that an investigation to be undertaken, the name of the case investigator and made aware of the specific allegations or concerns that have been raised. The practitioner must be given the opportunity to see any correspondence relating to the case together with a list of the people that the case investigator will interview. The practitioner must also be afforded the opportunity to put their view of events to the case investigator and given the opportunity to be accompanied.
- 1.16 At any stage of this process – or subsequent disciplinary action – the practitioner may be accompanied in any interview or hearing by a companion. In addition to statutory rights under the Employment Act 1999, the companion may be another employee of NHSBT; an official or representative of the British Medical Association (BMA) or a defence organisation. The companion may be legally qualified but he or she will not be acting in a legal capacity.
- 1.17 The case investigator has discretion on how the investigation is carried out but in all cases the purpose of the investigation is to ascertain the facts in an unbiased manner. Investigations are not intended simply to secure evidence against the practitioner as information gathered in the course of an investigation may clearly exonerate the practitioner or provide a sound basis for effective resolution of the matter.
- 1.18 If during the course of the investigation it transpires that the case involves more complex clinical issues than first anticipated, the case manager should consider whether an independent practitioner from another NHS body should be invited to assist.
- 1.19 The case investigator should complete the investigation within 4 weeks of appointment and submit their report to the case manager within a further 5 working days. The report of the investigation should give the case manager sufficient information to make a decision whether:
- There is a case of misconduct that should be put to a conduct panel;
 - There are concerns about the practitioner's health that should be considered by NHSBT's occupational health service;
 - There are concerns about the practitioner's performance that should be further explored by the NCAS;
 - Restrictions on practice or exclusion from work should be considered;
 - There are serious concerns that should be referred to the GMC;
 - There are intractable problems and the matter should be put before a capability panel;
 - No further action is needed.

Involvement of the NCAS following local investigation

- 1.20 Medical under-performance can be due to health problems, difficulties in the work environment, behaviour or a lack of clinical capability. These may occur in isolation or in a combination. The NCAS's processes are aimed at addressing all of these;

particularly where local action has not been able to take matters forward successfully. The NCAS's methods of working therefore assume commitment by all parties to take part constructively in a referral to the NCAS. For example, its assessors work to formal terms of reference, decided on after input from the doctor and the referring body.

1.21 The focus of the NCAS's work is therefore likely to involve performance difficulties that are serious and/or repetitive. That means:

- Performance falling well short of what doctors could be expected to do in similar circumstances and which, if repeated, would put patients seriously at risk;
- Alternatively or additionally, problems that are ongoing or (depending on severity) have been encountered on at least two occasions.

In cases where it becomes clear that the matters at issue focus on fraud, specific patient complaints or organisational governance, their further management may warrant a different local process. The NCAS may advise on this.

1.22 Where NHSBT is considering excluding a doctor (whether or not his or her performance is under discussion with the NCAS), the organisation will inform the NCAS of this at an early stage, so that alternatives to exclusion are considered. Procedures for exclusion are covered in section 2 of the procedure.

1.23 A practitioner undergoing assessment by the NCAS must cooperate with any request to give an undertaking not to practise in the NHS or private sector other than their main place of NHS employment until the NCAS assessment is complete. (Under circular HSC 2002/011, Annex 1, paragraph 3, "A doctor undergoing assessment by the NCAS must give a binding undertaking not to practise in the NHS or private sector other than in their main place of NHS employment until the assessment process is complete").

1.24 Failure to co-operate with a referral to the NCAS may be seen as evidence of a lack of willingness on the part of the doctor to work with the employer on resolving performance difficulties. If the practitioner chooses not to co-operate with such a referral, that may limit the options open to the parties and may necessitate disciplinary action and consideration of referral to the GMC.

Confidentiality

1.25 NHSBT and its employees will maintain confidentiality at all times. No press notice will be issued, nor the name of the practitioner released, in regard to any investigation or hearing into disciplinary matters. NHSBT will only confirm publicly that an investigation or disciplinary hearing is underway.

1.26 Personal data released to the case investigator for the purposes of the investigation must be fit for the purpose, nor disproportionate to the seriousness of the matter under investigation. NHSBT will operate consistently with the guiding principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

2 Restriction of Practice & Exclusion from Work

Introduction

2.1 This part of the procedure replaces the guidance in HSG(94)49 and the Disciplinary Procedure for NHSBT Medical Staff.

2.2 In this part of the procedure, the phrase "exclusion from work" has been used to replace the word "suspension" which can be confused with action taken by the GMC

to suspend the practitioner from the register pending a hearing of their case or as an outcome of a fitness to practise hearing.

2.3 NHSBT will ensure that:

- Exclusion from work is used only as an interim measure whilst action to resolve a problem is being considered;
- Where a practitioner is excluded, it is for the minimum necessary period of time: this can be up to but no more than four weeks at a time;
- All extensions of exclusion are reviewed and a brief report provided to the Chief Executive and the Board;
- A detailed report is provided, when requested to a single non-executive member of the Board (the "Designated Board Member"), who will be responsible for monitoring the situation until the exclusion has been lifted.

Managing the Risk to Patients and Donors

2.4 When serious concerns are raised about a practitioner, NHSBT will urgently consider whether it is necessary to place temporary restrictions on their practice. This might be to amend or restrict their clinical duties, obtain undertakings or provide for the exclusion of the practitioner from the workplace. Exclusion should only be considered as a last resort if alternative courses of action are not feasible.

2.5 Exclusion of clinical staff from the workplace is a temporary expedient. Exclusion is a precautionary measure and not a disciplinary sanction. Exclusion from work ("suspension") will be reserved for only the most exceptional circumstances.

2.6 Exclusion will only be used:

- To protect the interests of patients, donors or staff; and/or
- To assist the investigative process when there is a clear risk that the practitioner's presence would impede the gathering of evidence.

It is imperative that exclusion from work is not seen as the only course of action that could be taken. The degree of action must depend on the nature and seriousness on the concerns and on the need to protect patients, donors, the practitioner concerned and/or their colleagues.

2.7 Alternative ways to manage risks, avoiding exclusion, include:

- Medical or clinical director supervision of normal contractual clinical duties;
- Restricting the practitioner to certain forms of clinical duties;
- Restricting activities to administrative, research/audit, teaching and other educational duties. By mutual agreement the latter might include some formal retraining or re-skilling;
- Sick leave for the investigation of specific health problems.

2.8 In cases relating to the capability of a practitioner, consideration should be given to whether an action plan to resolve the problem can be agreed with the practitioner. Advice on the practicality of this approach will normally be sought from the NCAS. If the nature of the problem and a workable remedy cannot be determined in this way, the case manager should seek to agree with the practitioner to refer the case to the NCAS, which

can assess the problem in more depth and give advice on any action necessary. The case manager will take all reasonable steps to seek immediate telephone advice from the NCAS when considering restriction of practice or exclusion.

The Exclusion Process

- 2.9 NHSBT will not exclude a practitioner for more than four weeks at a time. The justification for continued exclusion must be reviewed on a regular basis and before any further four-week period of exclusion is imposed. Key officers and the Board have responsibilities for ensuring that the process is carried out quickly and fairly, kept under review and that the total period of exclusion is not prolonged.

Roles of Officers

- 2.10 The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for managing exclusion procedures and for ensuring that cases are properly managed. The decision to exclude a practitioner must be taken only by persons nominated under paragraph 2.11. The case will be discussed fully with the Chief Executive, the Medical & Research Director (or designated senior clinical manager), the Director of Human Resources, the NCAS and other interested parties (such as the police where there are serious criminal allegations or the Counter Fraud & Security Management Service) prior to the decision to exclude a practitioner. In the rare cases where immediate exclusion is required, the above parties must discuss the case at the earliest opportunity following exclusion, preferably at a case conference. N.B NCAS must be notified before a formal exclusion takes place.
- 2.11 The authority to exclude a member of staff is vested in the nominated NHSBT managers and includes the Chief Executive, the Medical & Research Director, and Associate Medical Directors (plus Clinical Directors for staff below the grade of consultant).
- 2.12 The Medical & Research Director (where applicable) will act as the case manager in the case of consultant staff, or delegate this role to a senior manager to oversee the case, and appoint a case investigator to explore and report on the circumstances that have led to the need to exclude the staff member. The investigating officer will provide factual information to assist the case manager in reviewing the need for exclusion and making progress reports to the Chief Executive or designated Board member.

The designated Board member must also ensure, among other matters, that time frames for investigation or exclusion are consistent with the principles of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Immediate Exclusion

- 2.14 In exceptional circumstances, an immediate time-limited exclusion may be necessary for the purposes identified in paragraph 2.6 above following:

- A critical incident when serious allegations have been made; or
- There has been a break down in relationships between a colleague and the rest of the team; or
- The presence of the practitioner is likely to hinder the investigation.

Such exclusion will allow a more measured consideration to be undertaken. This period should be used to carry out a preliminary situation analysis, to seek further advice from the NCAS and to convene a case conference. The manager making the exclusion must explain why the exclusion is being made in broad terms (there may be no formal allegation at this stage) and agree a date up to a maximum of two weeks away at which the practitioner should return to the workplace for a further meeting. The case manager must advise the practitioner of their rights, including rights of representation.

Formal Exclusion

- 2.15 A formal exclusion may only take place after the case manager has first considered whether there is a case to answer and then considered, at a case conference, whether there is reasonable and proper cause to exclude. The NCAS must be consulted where formal exclusion is being considered. If a case investigator has been appointed he or she must produce a preliminary report as soon as is possible to be available for the case conference. This preliminary report is advisory to enable the case manager to decide on the next steps as appropriate.
- 2.16 The report should provide sufficient information for a decision to be made as to whether:
- The allegation appears unfounded; or
 - There is a potential misconduct issue; or
 - There is a concern about the practitioner's capability; or
 - The complexity of the case warrants further detailed investigation before advice can be given on the way forward and what needs to be inquired into.
- 2.17 Formal exclusion of one or more clinicians must only be used where:
- (a) There is a need to protect the interests of patients or other staff pending the outcome of a full investigation of:
- Allegations of misconduct,
 - Concerns about serious dysfunctions in the operation of a clinical service,
 - Concerns about lack of capability or poor performance of sufficient seriousness that it is warranted to protect patients;
- or
- (b) The presence of the practitioner in the workplace is likely to hinder the investigation.
- 2.18 Full consideration should be given to whether the practitioner could continue in or (in cases of an immediate exclusion) return to work in a limited capacity or in an alternative, possibly non-clinical role, pending the resolution of the case.
- 2.19 When the practitioner is informed of the exclusion, there should be a witness present and the nature of the allegations or areas of concern should be conveyed to the practitioner. The practitioner should be told of the reason(s) why formal exclusion is regarded as the only way to deal with the case. At this stage the practitioner should be given the opportunity to state their case and propose alternatives to exclusion (e.g. further training, referral to occupational health, referral to the NCAS with voluntary restriction).
- 2.20 The formal exclusion must be confirmed in writing as soon as is reasonably practicable. The letter should state the effective date and time, duration (up to 4 weeks), the content of the allegations, the terms of the exclusion (e.g. exclusion from the premises, see paragraph 2.24, and the need to remain available for work paragraph 2.25) and that a full investigation or what other action will follow. The practitioner and their companion should be advised that they may make representations about the exclusion to the designated board member at any time after receipt of the letter confirming the exclusion.
- 2.21 In cases when disciplinary procedures are being followed, exclusion may be extended for four-week renewable periods until the completion of disciplinary procedures if a return to work is considered inappropriate. The exclusion will still only last for four weeks at a time and be subject to review. The exclusion will usually be lifted and the practitioner allowed back to work, with or without conditions placed upon the employment, as soon as the original reasons for exclusion no longer apply.

- 2.22 If the case manager considers that the exclusion will need to be extended over a prolonged period outside of his or her control (for example because of a police investigation), the case must be referred to the NCAS for advice as to whether the case is being handled in the most effective way and suggestions as to possible ways forward. However, even during this prolonged period the principle of four-week "renewable" must be adhered to.
- 2.23 If at any time after the practitioner has been excluded from work, investigation reveals that either the allegations are without foundation or that further investigation can continue with the practitioner working normally or with restrictions, the case manager must lift the exclusion, inform the Department of Health and make arrangements for the practitioner to return to work with any appropriate support as soon as practicable.

Exclusion from Premises

- 2.24 Practitioners will not be automatically barred from the premises upon exclusion from work. The case manager must always consider whether a bar from the premises is absolutely necessary. There are certain circumstances, however, where the practitioner should be excluded from the premises. This could be, for example, where there may be a danger of tampering with evidence, or where the practitioner may be a serious potential danger to patients or other staff. In other circumstances, however, there may be no reason to exclude the practitioner from the premises.

Keeping in Contact and Availability for Work

- 2.25 Exclusion under this procedure should usually be on full pay, therefore the practitioner must remain available for work with their employer during their normal contracted hours. The practitioner must inform the case manager of any other organisation(s) with whom they undertake either voluntary or paid work and seek their case manager's consent to continuing to undertake such work or to take annual leave or study leave. The practitioner should be reminded of these contractual obligations but would be given 24 hours notice to return to work. In exceptional circumstances the case manager may decide that payment is not justified because the practitioner is no longer available for work (e.g. abroad without agreement).
- 2.26 The case manager should make arrangements to ensure that the practitioner can keep in contact with colleagues on professional developments, and take part in continuing professional development (CPD) and clinical audit activities with the same level of support as other doctors in their employment. A mentor could be appointed for this purpose if a colleague is willing to undertake this role.

Informing other organisations

- 2.27 In cases where there is concern that the practitioner may be a danger to patients and/or donors, the organisation may consider that it has an obligation to inform such other organisations including the private sector, of any restriction on practice or exclusion and provide a summary of the reasons for it. Details of other employers (NHS and non-NHS) may be readily available from job plans, but where it is not the practitioner should supply them. Failure to do so may result in further disciplinary action or referral to the relevant regulatory body, as the paramount interest is the safety of patients. Where a NHS employer has placed restrictions on practice, the practitioner should agree not to undertake any work in that area of practice with any other employer.
- 2.28 Where the case manager believes that the practitioner is practising in other parts of the NHS or in the private sector in breach or defiance of an undertaking not to do so, he or she should contact the professional regulatory body and the relevant body within the Department of Health to consider the issue of an alert letter.

Informal Exclusion

- 2.29 No practitioner will be excluded from work other than through this new procedure. The organisation will not use "gardening leave" or other informal arrangements as a means of resolving a problem covered by this procedure.

Keeping Exclusions under Review: Informing the Board

- 2.30 The Board must be informed about exclusion at the earliest opportunity. The Board has a responsibility to ensure that the organisation's internal procedures are being followed. Therefore:

- a summary of the progress of each case at the end of each period of exclusion will be provided to the Board, demonstrating that procedures are being correctly followed and that all reasonable efforts are being made to bring the situation to an end as quickly as possible;
- receive a monthly statistical summary showing all exclusions with their duration and number of times the exclusion had been reviewed and extended will be provided with a copy sent to the Department of Health.

Regular review

- 2.31 The case manager will review the exclusion before the end of each four-week period and report the outcome to the Chief Executive and the Board. This report is advisory and it would be for the case manager to decide on the next steps as appropriate. The exclusion should usually be lifted and the practitioner allowed back to work, with or without conditions placed upon the employment, at any time the original reasons for exclusion no longer apply and there are no other reasons for exclusion. The exclusion will lapse and the practitioner will be entitled to return to work at the end of the four-week period if the exclusion is not actively reviewed. It is important to recognise that Board members might be required to sit as members of a future disciplinary or appeal panel. Therefore, information to the Board should only be sufficient to enable the Board to satisfy itself that the procedures are being followed. Only the designated Board member should be involved to any significant degree in each review. Careful consideration must be given as to whether the interests of patients, donors, other staff, the practitioner, and/or the needs of the investigative process continue to necessitate exclusion and give full consideration to the option of the practitioner returning to limited or alternative duties where practicable.
- 2.32 NHSBT will take review action before the end of each 4-week period. After three exclusions, the NCAS will be called in. The information below outlines the activities that will be undertaken at different stages of exclusion.

First and Second Reviews (and reviews after the Third Review)

- 2.33 Before the end of each exclusion (of up to 4 weeks) the case manager will review the position.
- The case manager decides on next steps as appropriate. Further renewal may be for up to 4 weeks at a time;
 - The case manager submits an advisory report of outcome to Chief Executive and NHSBT's Board;
 - Each renewal is a formal matter and must be documented as such;
 - The practitioner must be sent written notification on each occasion.

Third review

- 2.34 If the practitioner has been excluded for three periods:
- A report will be made to the Chief Executive outlining the reasons for the continued

exclusion, why restrictions on practice would not be an appropriate alternative, and if the investigation has not been completed, a timetable for completion of the investigation;

- The Chief Executive will report to the Department of Health (see paragraph 2.37) and the designated Board member (see paragraphs 2.40-2.42);
- The case will formally be referred to the NCAS explaining why continued exclusion is appropriate and what steps are being taken to conclude the exclusion, at the earliest opportunity;
- The NCAS will review the case with the Department of Health and advise NHSBT on the handling of the case until it is concluded.

6 months review

2.35 If the exclusion has been extended over six months:

- A further position report must be made by the Chief Executive to the Department of Health indicating the reason for continuing the exclusion, the anticipated time scale for completing the process and the actual and anticipated costs of exclusion;
- The Department of Health will form a view as to whether the case is proceeding at an appropriate pace and in the most effective manner and whether there is any advice they can offer to the Board.

2.36 There will be a normal maximum limit of 6 months exclusion, except for those cases involving criminal investigations of the practitioner concerned. The employer and the NCAS will actively review such cases at least every six months.

The role of the Department of Health in monitoring exclusions

2.37 When the Department of Health is notified of an exclusion, it should ensure that the NCAS has also been notified.

2.38 When an exclusion decision has been extended twice, the Chief Executive of NHSBT (or a nominated officer) must inform the Department of Health of what action is proposed to resolve the situation. This will include dates for hearings or give reasons for the delay. Where retraining or other rehabilitation action is proposed, the reason for continued exclusion must be given.

2.39 The Department of Health will receive the monthly statistical summary given to the Board from NHSBT and SHAs and collate them into a single report for the Department of Health.

The role of the Board and designated member

2.40 Board members may be required to sit as members of a disciplinary or appeal panel. Therefore, information given to the Board should only be sufficient to enable the Board to satisfy itself that the procedures are being followed. Only the designated Board member should be involved to any significant degree in each review.

2.41 The Board is responsible for designating one of its non-executive members as a "designated Board member" under these procedures. The designated Board member is the person who oversees the case manager and investigating manager during the investigation process and maintains momentum of the process.

2.42 This member's responsibilities include:

- Receiving reports and reviewing the continued exclusion from work;
- Considering representations from the practitioner about his or her exclusion;
- Considering any representations about the investigation.

Return To Work

- 2.43 If it is decided that the exclusion should come to an end, there must be formal arrangements for the return to work of the practitioner. It must be clear whether clinical and other responsibilities are to remain unchanged or what the duties and restrictions are to be and any monitoring arrangements to ensure patient safety.

3 Conduct and Disciplinary Matters

Introduction

- 3.1 Misconduct matters for doctors, as for all other staff groups, are dealt with under NHSBT's Disciplinary Policy. However, where any concerns about the performance or conduct of a medical practitioner are raised, NHSBT will contact the National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS) for advice before proceeding.
- 3.2 Where the alleged misconduct being investigated under NHSBT's Disciplinary Policy relates to matters of a professional nature, or where an investigation identifies issues of professional conduct, the case investigator must obtain appropriate independent professional advice. Similarly where a case involving issues of professional conduct proceeds to a hearing under NHSBT's conduct procedures the panel must include a member who is medically qualified and who is not currently employed by the organisation. It is advised that the selection of the medical panel member is discussed with the Chair of the Medical National Joint Negotiating Committee.
- 3.3 NHSBT will work with the relevant University, other NHS employer or other non-NHS employer to ensure that jointly agreed procedures are in place for dealing with any concerns about practitioners with honorary contracts.
- 3.4 NHSBT's Disciplinary Policy, including the Code of Conduct sets out acceptable standards of conduct and behaviour expected of all its employees. Breaches of these rules are considered to be "misconduct" and **examples** are set out below:
- A refusal to comply with reasonable requirements of the employer.
 - An infringement of the employer's disciplinary rules including conduct that contravenes the standard of professional behaviour required of doctors by their regulatory body.
 - The commission of criminal offences outside the place of work, which may, in particular circumstances, amount to misconduct.
 - Wilful, careless, inappropriate or unethical behaviour likely to compromise standards of care or donor and patient safety, or create serious dysfunction to the effective running of a service.
 - Failure to fulfil contractual obligations e.g. regular non-attendance at a donor session or apheresis therapeutic session, or not taking part in clinical governance activities. Failing to give proper support to other members of staff including doctors in training. Failure to undertake and maintain NHSBT mandatory training requirements.

Examples of issues that should be investigated under NHSBT's Capability Procedure are set out in paragraph 4.4 below.

- 3.5 Any allegation of misconduct against a doctor in a recognised training grade should be considered initially as a training issue and dealt with via the educational supervisor and college or clinical tutor with close involvement of the postgraduate dean from the outset.
- 3.6 Although it is for NHSBT to decide upon the most appropriate way forward having consulted the NCAS and their own employment law specialist, if a practitioner considers that the case has been wrongly classified as misconduct, he or she (or his/her

representative) is entitled to use NHSBT's Grievance Policy. Alternatively, or in addition he or she may make representations to the designated Board member.

Action when investigations identify possible criminal acts

3.7 Where an investigation establishes a suspected criminal action in the UK or abroad, this will be reported to the police. NHSBT's investigation will only proceed in respect of those aspects of the case, which are not directly related to the police investigation underway. NHSBT will consult the police to establish whether an investigation into any other matters would impede their investigation. In cases of fraud, the Counter Fraud & Security Management Service will be contacted.

Cases where criminal charges are brought not connected with an investigation by NHSBT

3.8 There are some criminal offences that, if proven, could render a doctor unsuitable for employment. In all cases, NHSBT, having considered the facts, will need to consider whether the employee poses a risk to patients, donors or colleagues and whether their conduct warrants instigating an investigation and the exclusion of the practitioner. NHSBT will have to give serious consideration to whether the employee can continue in their job once criminal charges have been made. Bearing in mind the presumption of innocence, NHSBT will consider whether the offence, if proven, is one that makes the doctor unsuitable for their type of work and whether, pending the trial, the employee can continue in their present job, should be allocated to other duties or should be excluded from work. This will depend on the nature of the offence and advice will be sought from Human Resources or legal adviser. NHSBT will explain the reasons for taking any such action to the practitioner concerned.

Dropping of charges or no court conviction

3.9 When NHSBT has refrained from taking action pending the outcome of a court case, if the practitioner is acquitted but the employer feels there is enough evidence to suggest a potential danger to patients, then NHSBT has a public duty to take action to ensure that the individual concerned does not pose a risk to patient safety. Similarly where there are insufficient grounds for bringing charges or the court case is withdrawn there may be grounds for considering police evidence where the allegations would, if proved, constitute misconduct, bearing in mind that the evidence has not been tested in court. It must be made clear to the police that any evidence they provide and is used in the organisation's case will have to be made available to the doctor concerned. Where charges are dropped, the presumption is that the employee will be reinstated.

Terms of Settlement on Termination of Employment

3.10 In some circumstances, terms of settlement may be agreed with a doctor if their employment is to be terminated. The following principles will be used by NHSBT in such circumstances:

- Settlement agreements must not be to the detriment of patient safety.
- It is not acceptable to agree any settlement that precludes either appropriate investigations being carried out and reports made or referral to the appropriate regulatory body.
- Payment will not normally be made when a member of staff's employment is terminated on disciplinary grounds or following the resignation of the member of staff.
- Expenditure on termination payments must represent value for money. For example, NHSBT should be able to defend the settlement on the basis that it could conclude the matter at less cost than other options. A clear record must be kept, setting out the calculations, assumptions and rationale of all decisions taken, to show that NHSBT has taken into account all relevant factors, including

legal advice. The audit trail must also show that the matter has been considered and approved by the remuneration committee and the Board. It must also be able to stand up to district auditor and public scrutiny.

- Offers of compensation, as an inducement to secure the voluntary resignation of an individual, must not be used as an alternative to the disciplinary process.
- All job references must be accurate, realistic and comprehensive and under no circumstance may they be misleading.
- Where a termination settlement is agreed, details may be confirmed in a Deed of Compromise that should set out what each party may say in public or write about the settlement. The Deed of Compromise is for the protection of each party, but it must not include clauses intended to cover up inappropriate behaviour or inadequate services and should not include the provision of an open reference. For the purposes of this paragraph, an open reference is one that is prepared in advance of a request by a prospective employer.

4. Procedure for Dealing with Issues of Capability

Introduction and General Principles

4.1 There will be occasions where NHSBT considers that there has been a clear failure by an individual to deliver an adequate standard of care, or standard of work and/or management, through lack of knowledge, ability or consistently poor performance. These are described as capability issues.

4.2 Concerns about the capability of a doctor may arise from a single incident or a series of events, reports or poor clinical outcomes. Advice from the NCAS will help the organisation to come to a decision on whether the matter raises questions about the practitioner's capability as an individual (health problems, behavioural difficulties or lack of clinical competence) or whether there are other matters that need to be addressed. If the concerns about capability cannot be resolved routinely by management, **the matter must be referred to the NCAS before the matter can be considered by a capability panel** (unless the practitioner refuses to have his or her case referred).

4.3 Matters which may fall under the capability procedure include:

- Out of date clinical practice;
- Inappropriate clinical practice arising from a lack of knowledge or skills that puts patients at risk;
- Incompetent clinical practice;
- Inability to communicate effectively with colleagues and/or patients;
- Inappropriate delegation of clinical responsibility;
- Inadequate supervision of delegated clinical tasks;
- Ineffective clinical team working skills.

This is not an exhaustive list.

4.4 Wherever possible, NHSBT will aim to resolve issues of capability (including clinical competence and health) through ongoing assessment and support. Early identification of problems is essential to reduce the risk of serious harm to patients. The NCAS should be consulted for advice to support the remediation of a doctor.

How to proceed where conduct and capability issues involved

4.5 It is inevitable that some cases will cover conduct and capability issues. If a case covers more than one category of problem, they should usually be combined under a

capability hearing although there may be occasions where it is necessary to pursue a conduct issue separately. NHSBT will decide upon the most appropriate way forward having consulted the NCAS and their own employment law specialists. In the event of a dispute over the procedure to be used. The practitioner is entitled to use NHSBT's Individual Grievance Policy if they consider that the case has been incorrectly classified. Alternatively, or in addition, he/she may make representations to the designated board member.

Duties of Employers

- 4.6 The procedures set out below are designed to cover issues where a doctor's capability to practise is in question. Prior to instigating these procedures, the employer should consider the scope for resolving the issue through counselling or retraining and should take advice from the NCAS.
- 4.6 NHSBT will work with the University, other NHS employer or other non-NHS employer, (where the employee holds an honorary contract or a joint employment contract), to ensure that jointly agreed procedures are in place for dealing with any concerns about practitioners with honorary contracts.
- 4.6.1 Capability may be affected by ill health and this will be considered in any investigation. Arrangements for handling concerns about a practitioner's health are described in part 5 of this procedure. NHSBT will follow its Attendance and Sickness Absence Management Policy & Procedure when dealing with ill-health.
- 4.7 NHSBT will ensure that investigations and capability procedures are conducted in a way that does not discriminate on the grounds of race, gender, disability or indeed on other grounds.
- 4.8 NHSBT will ensure that managers and case investigators receive appropriate and effective training in the operation of this procedure. Those undertaking investigations or sitting on capability or appeals panels must have had formal equality and diversity training before undertaking such duties. The Board will agree what training staff and Board members must have completed before they can take a part in these proceedings.

The pre-hearing process

- 4.11 When a report of NHSBT's investigation (as in part 1 of this procedure) has been received, the case manager must give the practitioner the opportunity to comment in writing on the factual content of the report produced by the case investigator. Comments in writing from the practitioner, including any mitigation, must normally be submitted to the case manager within 10 working days of the date of receipt of the request for comments. In exceptional circumstances, for example in complex cases or due to annual leave, the deadline for comments from the practitioner should be extended.
- 4.12 The case manager should decide what further action is necessary, taking into account the findings of the report, any comments that the practitioner has made and the advice of the NCAS. The case manager will need to consider urgently:
- Whether action under part 2 of the procedure is necessary to exclude the practitioner;
or
 - To place temporary restrictions on their clinical duties.

The case manager will also need to consider with the Medical & Research Director and Director of Human Resources whether the issues of capability can be resolved through local action (such as retraining, counselling, performance review). If this action is not practicable for any reason the matter must be referred to the NCAS for it to consider

whether an assessment should be carried out and to provide assistance in drawing up an action plan. The case manager will inform the practitioner concerned of the decision immediately and normally within 10 working days of receiving the practitioner's comments.

4.13 NHSBT will take the advice and assistance of NCAS in the drawing up an action plan designed to enable the practitioner to remedy any lack of capability that has been identified during the assessment. The organisation will facilitate the agreed action plan (which has to be agreed by NHSBT and the practitioner before it can be actioned). There may be occasions when a case has been considered by the NCAS, but the advice of its assessment panel is that the practitioner's performance is so fundamentally flawed that no educational and/or organisational action plan has a realistic chance of success. In these circumstances, the case manager must make a decision, based upon the completed investigation report and informed by the NCAS advice, whether the case should be determined under the capability procedure. If so, a panel hearing will be necessary.

4.14 If the practitioner does not agree to the case being referred to the NCAS, a panel hearing will normally be necessary.

4.15 If a capability hearing is to be held, the following procedure will be followed beforehand:

- The case manager must notify the practitioner in writing of the decision to arrange a capability hearing. This notification should be made at least 20 working days before the hearing and include details of the allegations and the arrangements for proceeding including the practitioner's rights to be accompanied and copies of any documentation and/or evidence that will be made available to the capability panel. This period will give the practitioner sufficient notice to allow them to arrange for a companion to accompany them to the hearing if they so choose;
- All parties must exchange any documentation, including witness statements, on which they wish to rely in the proceedings no later than 10 working days before the hearing. In the event of late evidence being presented, the employer should consider whether a new date should be set for the hearing;
- Should either party request a postponement to the hearing the case manager is responsible for ensuring that a reasonable response is made and that time extensions to the process are kept to a minimum. NHSBT retains the right, after a reasonable period (not less than 30 working days), to proceed with the hearing in the practitioner's absence, although NHSBT will act reasonably in deciding to do so, taking into account any comments made by the practitioner where appropriate;
- Should the practitioner's ill health prevent the hearing taking place NHSBT will implement the Attendance and Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure and involve the Occupational Health Department as necessary;
- Witnesses who have made written statements at the inquiry stage may, but will not necessarily, be required to attend the capability hearing. Following representations from either side contesting a witness statement that is to be relied upon in the hearing, the Chairperson will invite the witness to attend. The Chairperson cannot require anyone other than an employee to attend. However, if evidence is contested and the witness is unable or unwilling to attend, the panel will reduce the weight given to the evidence as there will not be the opportunity to challenge it properly. A final list of witnesses to be called must be given to both parties not less than two working days in advance of the hearing;
- If witnesses who are required to attend the hearing choose to be accompanied,

the accompanying person cannot participate in the hearing.

The hearing framework

4.16 An Executive Director of the organisation will chair the capability hearing. The panel will comprise a total of 3 people, normally 2 members of the Board, or senior staff appointed by the Board for the purpose of the hearing. At least one member of the panel must be a medical practitioner who is not employed by the organisation. NHSBT will seek to agree the external medical member with the Chair of the Medical Staff National Joint Negotiating Committee.

4.17 As far as is reasonably practicable or possible no member of the panel or advisers to the panel should have been previously involved in the investigation. In the case of clinical academics a further panel member may be appointed in accordance with any protocol agreed between NHSBT and the University. In the case of practitioners holding a joint or honorary contract with either a NHS employer or non-NHS employer, a further panel member may be appointed in accordance with any protocol agreed between NHSBT and the other employer.

4.18 Arrangements will be made for the panel to be advised by:

- A senior member of staff from Human Resources, and
- A senior clinician from the same or similar clinical specialty as the practitioner concerned, but from another NHS employer;
- A representative of a University or other NHS employer where appropriate

It is important that the panel is aware of the typical standard of competence required of the grade of doctor in question. If for any reason the senior clinician is unable to advise on the appropriate level of competence, a doctor from another NHS employer in the same grade as the practitioner in question will be asked to provide advice.

4.19 The practitioner may raise an objection to the choice of any panel member within 5 working days of notification. NHSBT will review the situation and take reasonable measures to ensure that the membership of the panel is acceptable to the practitioner. It may be necessary to postpone the hearing while this matter is resolved. NHSBT will provide the practitioner with the reasons for reaching its decision in writing before the hearing can take place.

Representation at capability hearings

4.20 The practitioner will be given every reasonable opportunity to present his or her case, although the hearing should not be conducted in a legalistic or excessively formal manner.

4.21 The practitioner may be represented in the process by a work colleague, or a representative who may be from or retained by a trade union or defence organisation. Such a representative may be legally qualified but they will not be representing the practitioner formally in a legal capacity. The representative will be entitled to present a case on behalf of the practitioner, address the panel and question the management case and any witness evidence.

Conduct of the capability hearing

4.22 The hearing should be conducted as follows:

- The panel and its advisers the practitioner, his/her representative and the case manager will be present at all times during the hearing. Witnesses will be

- admitted only to give their evidence and answer questions and will then retire;
- The Chairperson of the panel will be responsible for the proper conduct of the proceedings. The Chairperson should introduce all persons present and announce which witnesses are available to attend the hearing;
- The procedure for dealing with any witnesses attending the hearing shall be the same and shall reflect the following:
 - The witness to confirm any written statement and give any supplementary evidence;
 - The side calling the witness can question the witness;
 - The other side can then question the witness;
 - The panel may question the witness;
 - The side which called the witness may seek to clarify any points which have arisen during questioning but may not at this point raise new evidence.

4.21 The order of presentation shall be:

- The Case Manager presents the management case including calling any witnesses. The above procedure for dealing with witnesses shall be undertaken for each witness in turn, at the end of which each witness shall be allowed to leave;
- The Chairperson shall invite the Case Manager to clarify any matters arising from the management case on which the panel requires further clarification.
- The practitioner and/or their representative shall present the practitioner's case, calling any witnesses. The above procedure for dealing with witnesses shall be undertaken for each witness in turn, at the end of which each witness shall be allowed to leave;
- The Chairperson shall invite the practitioner and/or representative to clarify any matters arising from the practitioner's case on which the panel requires further clarification;
- The Chairperson shall invite the Case Manager to make a brief closing statement summarising the key points of the case;
- The Chairperson shall invite the practitioner and/or representative to make a brief closing statement summarising the key points of the practitioner's case. Where appropriate this statement may also introduce any grounds for mitigation;
- The panel shall then retire to consider its decision.

Decisions

4.22 The panel will have the power to make a range of decisions including the following:

- No action required;
- Oral agreement that there must be an improvement in clinical performance within a specified time scale with a written statement of what is required and how it might be achieved [stays on the employee's record for 6 months];
- Written warning that there must be an improvement in clinical performance within a specified time scale with a statement of what is required and how it might be achieved [stays on the employee's record for 1 year];
- Final written warning that there must be an improvement in clinical performance within a specified time scale with a statement of what is required and how it might be achieved [stays on the employee's record for 1 year];
- Termination of contract.

It is also reasonable for the panel to make comments and recommendations on issues other than the competence of the practitioner, where these issues are relevant to the

case. For example, there may be matters around the systems and procedures operated by the employer that the panel wishes to comment upon.

- 4.23 A record of oral agreements and written warnings should be kept on the practitioner's personnel file but will be removed following the specified period.
- 4.24 The decision of the panel will be communicated to the parties as soon as possible and normally within 5 working days of the hearing. Because of the complexities of the issues under deliberation and the need for detailed consideration, the parties should not necessarily expect a decision on the day of the hearing.
- 4.25 The decision must be confirmed in writing to the practitioner. This notification must include reasons for the decision, clarification of the practitioner's right of appeal and notification of any intent to make a referral to the GMC or any other external/professional body.

Appeals in Capability Cases

- 4.26 The appeals procedure provides a mechanism for practitioners who disagree with the outcome of a decision to have an opportunity for the case to be reviewed. The appeal panel will need to establish whether NHSBT's procedures have been adhered to and that the panel in arriving at their decision acted fairly and reasonably based on:

- A fair and thorough investigation of the issue;
- Sufficient evidence arising from the investigation or assessment on which to base the decision;
- Whether in the circumstances the decision was fair and reasonable, and commensurate with the evidence heard.

It can also hear new evidence submitted by the practitioner and consider whether it might have significantly altered the decision of the original hearing. The appeal panel, however, should not rehear the case in its entirety (but in certain circumstances it may order a new hearing see 4.28).

- 4.27 A dismissed practitioner will potentially be able to take their case to an Employment Tribunal where the reasonableness of NHSBT's actions can be tested.

The Appeal Process

- 4.28 The predominant purpose of the appeal is to ensure that a fair hearing was given to the original case and a fair and reasonable decision reached by the hearing panel. The appeal panel has the power to confirm or vary the decision made at the capability hearing, or order that the case is reheard. Where it is clear in the course of the appeal hearing that the proper procedures have not been followed and the appeal panel determines that the case needs to be fully re-heard, the Chairperson of the panel shall have the power to instruct a new capability hearing.
- 4.29 Where the appeal is against dismissal, the practitioner should not be paid during the period of appeal, from the date of termination of employment. Should the appeal be upheld the practitioner should be reinstated and must be paid backdated to the date of termination of employment. Where the decision is to rehear the case, the practitioner should also be reinstated, subject to any conditions or restrictions in place at the time of the original hearing, and paid backdated to the date of termination of employment.

The Appeal Panel

4.30 The panel will consist of three members. The members of appeal panel must not have had any previous direct involvement in the matters that are the subject of the appeal, for example they must not have acted as the designated board member. These members will be:

- An independent member (trained in legal aspects of appeals) from an approved pool. This person will be appointed from the national list held by NHS Employers for this purpose (see Annex A to 'Maintaining High Professional Standards in the Modern NHS'). This person is designated Chairperson;
- The Chairperson (or other non-executive director) of the employing organisation who must have the appropriate training for hearing an appeal;
- A medically qualified member who is not employed by NHSBT who must also have the appropriate training for hearing an appeal. NHSBT will discuss and seek to agree the external medical member with the Chair of the Medical Staff National Joint Negotiating Committee

4.31 The panel should call on others to provide specialist advice. This should normally include:

- A consultant from the same specialty or subspecialty as the appellant, but from another NHS employer;
- A senior human resources representative

It is important that the panel is aware of the typical standard of competence required of the grade of doctor in question. If for any reason the senior clinician is unable to advise on the appropriate level of competence, a doctor from another NHS employer in the same grade as the practitioner in question should be asked to provide advice.

4.32 NHSBT should make the arrangements for the panel and notify the appellant as soon as possible and in any event within the recommended timetable in paragraph 4.33. The practitioner may raise an objection to the choice of any panel member within 5 working days of notification. NHSBT will review the situation and take reasonable measures to ensure that the membership of the panel is acceptable to the practitioner. Where in rare cases agreement cannot be reached upon the constitution of the panel, the appellant's objections should be noted carefully.

4.33 It is in the interests of all concerned that appeals are heard speedily and as soon as possible after the original capability hearing. The following timetable will apply in all cases:

- Appeal by written statement to be submitted to the designated appeal point (normally the Director of Human Resources) within 25 working days of the date of the written confirmation of the original decision;
- Hearing to take place within 25 working days of date of lodging appeal;
- Decision reported to the appellant and NHSBT within 5 working days of the conclusion of the hearing.

4.34 The timetable will be agreed between NHSBT and the appellant and thereafter varied only by mutual agreement. The case manager should be informed and is responsible for ensuring that extensions are absolutely necessary and kept to a minimum.

Powers of the Appeal Panel

- 4.35 The appeal panel has the right to call witnesses of its own volition, but must notify both parties at least 10 working days in advance of the hearing and provide them with a written statement from any such witness at the same time.
- 4.36 Exceptionally, where during the course of the hearing the appeal panel determines that it needs to hear the evidence of a witness not called by either party, then it shall have the power to adjourn the hearing to allow for a written statement to be obtained from the witness and made available to both parties before the hearing reassembles.
- 4.37 If, during the course of the hearing, the appeal panel determines that new evidence needs to be presented, it should consider whether an adjournment is appropriate. Much will depend on the weight of the new evidence and its relevance. The appeal panel has the power to determine whether to consider the new evidence as relevant to the appeal, or whether the case should be reheard, on the basis of the new evidence, by a capability hearing panel.

Conduct of Appeal Hearing

- 4.38 All parties should have all documents, including witness statements, from the previous capability hearing together with any new evidence.
- 4.39 The practitioner may be represented in the process by a colleague or a representative who may be from or retained by a trade union or defence organisation. Such a representative may be legally qualified but they will not be representing the practitioner formally in a legal capacity. The representative will be entitled to present a case on behalf of the practitioner, address the panel and question the management case and any written evidence.
- 4.40 Both parties will present full statements of fact to the appeal panel and will be subject to questioning by either party, as well as the panel. When all the evidence has been presented, both parties shall briefly sum up. At this stage, no new information can be introduced. The appellant (or his/her companion) can at this stage make a statement in mitigation.
- 4.41 The panel, after receiving the views of both parties, shall consider and make its decision in private.

Decision

- 4.42 The decision of the appeal panel shall be made in writing to the appellant and shall be copied to NHSBT's case manager such that it is received within 5 working days of the conclusion of the hearing. The decision of the appeal panel is final and binding. There shall be no correspondence on the decision of the panel, except and unless clarification is required on what has been decided (but not on the merits of the case), in which case it should be sought in writing from the Chairperson of the appeal panel.

Action following hearing

- 4.43 Records must be kept, including a report detailing the capability issues, the practitioner's defence or mitigation, the action taken and the reasons for it. These records must be kept confidential and retained in accordance with the capability procedure and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). These records need to be made available to those with a legitimate call upon them, such as the practitioner, the Regulatory Body, or in response to a Direction from an Employment Tribunal.

Termination of Employment with Performance Issue Unresolved

- 4.44 Where an employee leaves employment before disciplinary procedures have been completed, any outstanding disciplinary investigation will be concluded and capability proceedings will be completed where possible.
- 4.45 Where employment ends before investigation or proceedings have been concluded, every reasonable effort will be made to ensure the former employee remains involved in the process. If contact with the employee has been lost, NHSBT will invite them to attend any hearing by writing to both their last known home address and their registered address (the two will often be the same). NHSBT will make a judgement, based on the evidence available, as to whether the allegations about the practitioner's capability are upheld. If the allegations are upheld, NHSBT will take appropriate action, such as requesting the issue of an alert letter and referral to the professional regulatory body, referral to the police, or the Independent Safeguarding Authority.
- 4.46 If an excluded employee or an employee facing capability proceedings becomes ill, they will be subject to NHSBT's Absence and Sickness Management Policy and Procedure. This policy takes precedence over the capability procedures and NHSBT will take reasonable steps to give the employee time to recover and attend any hearing. Where the employee's illness exceeds 4 weeks, they must be referred to the Occupational Health Service. The Occupational Health Service will advise NHSBT on the expected duration of the illness and any consequences it may have for the capability process and will also be able to advise on the employee's capacity for future work, as a result of which NHSBT may wish to consider retirement on health grounds. Should employment be terminated as a result of ill health, the investigation should still be taken to a conclusion and NHSBT form a judgement as to whether the allegations are upheld.
- 4.47 If, in exceptional circumstances, a hearing proceeds in the absence of the practitioner, for reasons of ill-health, the practitioner will have the opportunity to submit written submissions and/or have a representative attend in his or her absence.
- 4.48 Where a case involves allegations of abuse against a child, the guidance issued to the NHS in September 2000, called "The Protection of Children Act 1999 – A Practical Guide to the Act for all Organisations Working with Children" gives more detailed information. A copy can be found on the Department of Health website (www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics).

5. Handling Concerns about a Practitioners Health

Introduction

- 5.1 A wide variety of health problems can have an impact on an individual's clinical performance. These conditions may arise spontaneously or be as a consequence of work place factors such as stress.
- 5.2 NHSBT's key principle for dealing with individuals with health problems is that, wherever possible and consistent with reasonable public protection, they should be treated, rehabilitated or re-trained (for example if they cannot undertake exposure prone procedures) and kept in employment, rather than be lost from the NHS.

Retaining the services of individuals with health problems

- 5.3 Wherever possible NHSBT will attempt to continue to employ individuals provided this does not place patients or colleagues at risk. In particular, NHSBT will consider the following actions for staff with ill-health problems:

- Sick leave for the practitioner (the practitioner to be contacted frequently on a pastoral basis to prevent them feeling isolated);

- Remove the practitioner from certain duties;
- Reassign them to a different area of work;
- Arrange re-training or adjustments to their working environment, with appropriate advice from the National Clinical Assessment Service and/or deanery, under the reasonable adjustment provisions in the Equality Act 2010

This is not an exhaustive list

Reasonable adjustment

- 5.4 At all times the practitioner will be supported by NHSBT and the Occupational Health Service (OHS) which will ensure that the practitioner is offered every available resource to get back to practice where appropriate. NHSBT will consider what reasonable adjustments could be made to their workplace or other arrangements, in line with the Equality Act 2010. In particular, it will consider:

- Making adjustments to the premises;
- Re-allocating some of a disabled person's duties to another;
- Transferring an employee to an existing vacancy;
- Altering an employee's working hours or pattern of work;
- Assigning the employee to a different workplace;
- Allowing absence for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment;
- Providing additional training or retraining;
- Acquiring/modifying equipment;
- Modifying procedures for testing or assessment;
- Providing a reader or interpreter;
- Establishing mentoring arrangements.

- 5.5 In some cases retirement due to ill health may be necessary. Ill health retirement should be approached in a reasonable and considerate manner, in line with NHS Pensions Agency advice. However, any issues relating to conduct or capability that have arisen will be resolved, using the appropriate agreed procedures. (Refer to NHSBT's Absence and Sickness Management Policy and Procedure for further advice on ill-health retirement).

Handling Health Issues

- 5.6 Where there is an incident that points to a problem with the practitioner's health, the incident may need to be investigated to determine a health problem. If the report recommends OHS involvement, the nominated manager must immediately refer the practitioner to a qualified occupational physician (usually a consultant) with the Occupational Health Service.
- 5.7. The NCAS should be approached to offer advice on any situation and at any point where the employer is concerned about a doctor. Even apparently simple or early concerns should be referred as these are easier to deal with before they escalate.
- 5.8 The occupational health physician should agree a course of action with the practitioner and send his/her recommendations to the Medical & Research Director and a meeting should be convened with the Director of Human Resources, the Medical & Research Director or case manager, the practitioner and case worker from the OHS to agree a timetable of action and rehabilitation (where appropriate). The practitioner may wish to bring a support companion to these meetings. This could be a family member, a colleague or a trade union or defence association representative. Confidentiality must be maintained by all parties at all times.

- 5.9 If a doctor's ill health makes them a danger to patients and they do not recognise that, or are not prepared to co-operate with measures to protect patients, then exclusion from work and referral to the professional regulatory body must be considered, irrespective of whether or not they have retired on the grounds of ill health.
- 5.10 In those cases where there is impairment of performance solely due to ill health, disciplinary procedures will be considered only in the most exceptional of circumstances, for example if the individual concerned refuses to co-operate with the employer to resolve the underlying situation e.g. by repeatedly refusing a referral to the OHS or the NCAS. In these circumstances the procedures in part 4 should be followed.
- 5.11 There will be circumstances where an employee who is subject to disciplinary proceedings puts forward a case, on health grounds, that the proceedings should be delayed, modified or terminated. In such cases NHSBT will refer the doctor to the OHS for assessment as soon as possible. Unreasonable refusal to accept a referral to, or to co-operate with, the OHS under these circumstances, may give separate grounds for pursuing disciplinary action.
- 5.12 Special Professional Panels (generally referred to as the "three wise men") were set up by under circular HC(82)13. This part of the procedure replaces HC(82)13, which is cancelled.

Review

To be reviewed jointly by NHSBT and Medical Staff National Joint Negotiating Committee in November 2012

Appendix A

The National Clinical Assessment Service

1. The National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS), previously the National Clinical Assessment Authority was established as a special health authority in April 2001.
2. NCAS provides a confidential service to the health service in managing practitioners whose performance gives cause for concern.
3. If a concern comes to light, the employer/contracting body, or the practitioner themselves, can contact NCAS for help.
4. NCAS offers advice and ongoing support to help address performance concerns. Where appropriate, NCAS can carry out an assessment of the practitioner.
5. Initial contact with NCAS may be made by any representative of NHSBT with the delegated authority to act on behalf of NHSBT.

6. In some cases, NCAS involvement takes the forms of general advice over the phone through one or two telephone conversations with an NCAS adviser. In other cases, more detailed support is provided, often by facilitating or participating in case conferences. NCAS may also carry out an assessment of the practitioner's practice. This is usually where concerns are significant, repetitious and have not proven amenable to local resolution.
7. Failure to co-operate with a referral to NCAS may be seen as evidence of a lack of willingness on the part of a practitioner to work with NHSBT on resolving performance difficulties. If a practitioner chooses not to co-operate with such a referral, that may limit the options open to both NHSBT and the practitioner, and may necessitate disciplinary action and consideration of a referral to the GMC.
8. Further information is available at www.ncas.npsa.nhs.uk.
9. Contact details are as follows:

Advice service telephone number 020 7062 1655