

Part 2: Relevant GMC Policies 1984 to 1995

18. Fundamental philosophic changes in the GMC's policies were made during this period. The principal changes were:

- a. Adopting a role in fostering standards of good practice by defining the qualities and attributes of a good doctor rather than defining what would amount to serious professional misconduct.
- b. Identifying professionalism as maintaining an appropriate standard of practice; and, as part of that, beginning to change that culture in medicine where doctors protected one another from criticism, in favour of a duty to act on poor practice.
- c. Regarding poor or unsafe clinical performance as within the GMC's scope rather than as the sole responsibility of others.

19. These significant shifts in the GMC's view of its own role, and of the purpose and nature of a self-regulated profession, influenced the GMC in a number of practical ways:

- a. The development of explicit generic standards of good medical practice, for example in *Tomorrow's Doctors* (1993) and in *Good Medical Practice* (1995).
- b. The insistence that doctors take action when a colleague's conduct, health or performance was putting patients at risk.
- c. The introduction of the Performance Procedures, from July 1997, as a framework for dealing with doctors whose performance was seriously deficient.

a. Professional standards

Overview

20. I have summarised those aspects of standards development which seem most relevant to the Inquiry in the paragraphs below. A more detailed account is provided in Annex D.

21. In the early 1980s, the GMC saw its standard-setting role primarily in terms of character and conduct and hence of the standing and reputation of the profession and the doctor. As a result the guidance focussed on questions of honesty, improper relationships and abuses of trust. Those issues were - and remain – important. However, they virtually excluded standards of clinical practice and relationships with patients, both seen as vital today.

22. Until 1995, the guidance on standards was published as part of the description of the GMC's conduct procedures. The first section of *The Blue Book* described the procedures for considering a complaint and reaching a finding of serious professional misconduct; and the subsequent text described the kinds of conduct which might lead