

Fitness to Practise Committee 21 October 2010

Ambulance Service meetings 2010

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

In June 2010, the Fitness to Practise Department began a series of meetings with all ambulance service trusts across the four UK countries. This forms part of the Fitness to Practise Department work-plan for 2010- 2011. The aim of the meetings is to discuss a number of topics in light of the high number of fitness to practise cases received about Paramedics.

The attached paper sets out the key feedback from the eight ambulance service trusts the HPC has met with since June 2010.

Decision

The Committee is asked to note the paper, no decision is required.

Background information

In 2009-2010, cases referred to the HPC by employers that concerned paramedics was 36 % which is roughly in line with the average across all professions (33%). The number of Article 22 (6) allegations are high for paramedics due to the high self referral rate. Paramedics made up 46% of the self referrals received in 2009-2010.

In 2009 -10, the Investigating Committee case to answer rate for paramedics was 71%. Across all professions, the case to answer rate was 57%

Resource implications

The resource implications for the Fitness to Practise Department are management time away from the office to attend the meetings across the UK

Financial implications

Costs of travel to attend the meetings across the UK

Appendices

Ambulance service visit report
Ambulance service letter

Date of paper

4 October 2010

Ambulance Service meetings 2010

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2010, the Fitness to Practise Department began a series of meetings with all ambulance services across the four UK countries. Over the past few years, the HPC has seen an increasing number of fitness to practise cases concerning Paramedics. In 2009-2010 this amounted to 21% of the total number of cases received across all of the professions regulated by the HPC. The aim of the meetings is to discuss a number of topics in light of the number of fitness to practise cases relating to Paramedics.
- 1.2 This report highlights the key feedback received from the ambulance service trusts that the HPC has met with between June and September 2010. To date, the Fitness to Practise Department (and on some occasions, representatives from the Education Department) has met with eight ambulance service trusts, as detailed below:

West Midlands Ambulance Service– 29 June 2010
South Western Ambulance Service - 23 July 2010
Great Western Ambulance Service Meeting - 10 August 2010
London Ambulance Service – 13 August 2010
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Meeting - 16 August 2010
Scottish Ambulance Service Meeting - 17 August 2010
East of England Ambulance Service – 6 September 2010

2.0 Information provided to Ambulance Service Trusts

- 2.1 General information was provided to each trust on various areas, including; paramedic statistics, reasons for the number of cases received concerning Paramedics, referral guidance for employers, learning points, information about how the fitness to practise process works and any information that was of assistance to the trusts in their engagement with the HPC

3.0 Key feedback points/ comments

3.1 HPC Referral

- One trust commented that there is often an assumption amongst unions that an employer automatically refers issues to the HPC – this is not necessarily the case as employers sometimes consider that an issue does not warrant a referral to the HPC. For example, minor

issues that have been remedied through appropriate training and supervision.

- Queries about when to refer to the HPC
- How does the HPC share information with other organisations/ regulators
- It was the experience of one trust that cases were being referred to the HPC from the peer groups rather than from the employer. They commented that they sometimes see issues referred to the HPC by other Paramedic employees, this may be because they are disgruntled or dissatisfied with the way in which the matter was dealt with by their employer. The HPC receives the highest number of Paramedic cases from employers
- Several trusts asked where they sit in terms of the referral numbers – are they higher or lower than other Ambulance Services – information was provided on this where it was available

3.2 Timescales

- Comments were made by one trust that there should be more awareness around timescales of the fitness to practise process
- The length of time cases take is an issue that two trusts thought we needed to work on and that we need to better communicate the timescales and reduce the length of time. As part of the recommendations from the expectations of complainants work, the HPC is currently reviewing and updating all standard letters and brochures. Information regarding the length of time a case is likely to take and the reasons for this will now be included in all standard letters

3.3 Professional practice/ training

- One trust asked what they can do to stop allegations and incorporate appropriate learning into their training
- Another trust commented that they are focusing on professional issues this year and increasing awareness with its employees of their professional responsibilities, which includes adhering to the HPC's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics
- In the experience of one trust, record keeping issues could be addressed with more guidance in the area, covering falsification, the quality of documents and accuracy
- There was a comment that a change in culture is necessary amongst the paramedic profession

3.4 Awareness of HPC and its powers

- Two trusts commented that paramedics 'live in fear' of the HPC and that they see it as a double punishment when employers refer to the HPC.
- There was a suggestion that the HPC include in documentation/literature that we do not disclose the hearing bundle

- other than to the panel and those involved in the hearing, even if requested under the Freedom of Information Act (2000)
- We were asked what measures we have in place to deal with vexatious complaints and we referred them to the HPC's policy on this.
 - One trust commented that suspension by HPC could easily lead to dismissal by employer – it was explained that panels do take this into account.
 - There was a concern about discrepancy between the employer's disciplinary sanction and the HPC's sanction – hard to understand panels decisions and reasons sometimes. For example, if a paramedic is dismissed from employment then they would expect them to be struck off
 - A trust commented that when sending information to registrants, it would be helpful to also inform the employer so they know what the registrant knows
 - Some trusts commented that in some cases they do not understand how the panel decision was reached and why in a seemingly serious case, a no case to answer decision was made
 - There was an issue raised about the information that the HPC put in the public domain and understanding of why we do this
 - One trust stated that paramedics are still not clear on what is expected in terms of CPD. They find this daunting and difficult to understand.
 - This same trust stated that there is confusion about what health information needs to be declared to the HPC
 - There was a feeling amongst one or two trusts that we didn't 'market' ourselves very well in that every paramedic thinks the only action we can take is strike people off. More effort should be made to communicate the reality.
 - Another trust commented that our current literature encourages over reporting
 - The view amongst the majority of the trusts that registrants views of the HPC's FTP process is that it is a double punishment
 - One trust asked how we communicate information to registrants and how are we going to dispel myths and pre-conceptions about HPC

3.5 Employees attending the HPC as witnesses

- With one trust we discussed at length issues around witnesses attending the HPC to give evidence and the trust not being aware that members of their staff were being called as witnesses, even where the trust is the referrer. HPC indicated that in sensitive cases they should let us know that they want to be informed of who we will be calling as witnesses in advance to help the member of staff and make it easier for them.
- This same trust asked if we contact HR with regard to witnesses being called. We confirmed that often we do, for example, when there are a large number of witnesses.
- It was commented that there is a varying level of preparation and support for witnesses attending hearings – need more time to meet

advocate before the hearing starts – also to talk through witness expectations

- One issue a trust raised was that it was a very quick time period between arriving at HPC and giving evidence and they would appreciate call from our solicitors 2 weeks prior to the hearing to discuss lines of questioning and so on

3.6 Paramedics and professional representation

- One trust commented that paramedics lack professional representation especially when compared to other professions. The College of Paramedics is a less well established body which is difficult for paramedics. It is a newer profession – historically lacks same educational requirements as other professions

3.7 Case specific feedback

- There was one case where they have not had a response to a letter for 2 months. This has now been looked into and dealt with
- One trust commented that there have been instances where they have known an individual was under investigation but found out the outcome through the press
- One trust stated that they have not to date referred any bullying and harassment cases but are reviewing this process.
- There was positive feedback in relation to a case HPC didn't progress as an FTP case involving a personality clash

3.8 Other

- An issue was raised about Scottish paramedics that work in remote and rural locations. This can sometimes be on an island that only had 40 emergency calls a year. There can be issues with keeping standards up to date and trainees getting the range of experience they need.
- It may be difficult to know about FTP issues with paramedics in remote locations.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The Fitness to Practise Department will be setting up central points of contact for all ambulance service trusts. A Lead Case Manager and Case Team will be allocated for specific trusts to contact. It is anticipated that this will help improve consistency and communication with paramedic employers
- 4.2 A number of similar areas of feedback were highlighted by the eight ambulance service trusts we have met with so far. This provides valuable feedback to the Fitness to Practise Department and assists with future planning and policy review.

05 May 2010

ADDRESS

Dear XXXX

Liaison Meeting

As you know, the Health Professions Council (HPC), is the statutory regulatory body responsible for the regulation of Paramedics. Our responsibilities include maintaining a register of health professionals who meet our standards and taking action if fall below those standards.

Over the past few years, we have seen an increasing number of complaints concerning the fitness to practise of Paramedics, and in 2009-2010 this amounted to 21% of the total number of complaints received regarding all of the professions regulated by the HPC.

We are arranging individual meetings with all UK Ambulance Trusts, and would like to arrange meetings with the appropriate representatives from your organisation to discuss a number of topics including:

- the reasons for the number of cases received concerning Paramedics;
- any learning from those cases;
- how the HPC fitness to practise process works;
- central points of contact at the HPC and at your Trust;
- issues that should be referred to the HPC and when a referral to HPC should be made; and
- any information that would be of assistance to your Trust in its engagement with HPC's fitness to practise process.

I would be grateful if you could provide my PA, Beth Shaw, with the appropriate contact to arrange such a meeting. We would hope that the meetings with all the Ambulance Trusts will take place before the end of this calendar year. Beth can be reached at beth.shaw@hpc-uk.org or on telephone number 020 7840 9125.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Kelly Johnson
Director of Fitness to Practise