



UP TO SPEED

What is the role of doctors within the government drug strategy?
Dr Linda Harris on two new projects set to change doctors' approach to drug and alcohol use.

What kinds of contribution can doctors make to supporting drug users within a collaborative, multi-disciplinary team? And what skills and competencies do they need to take on the various tasks that may be asked of them within an integrated, recovery-oriented treatment system?

The medical Royal Colleges (which have a key role in overseeing the training, professional development and regulation of doctors) will this summer launch two projects to address such questions. The decision to take a fresh look has come in response to the changing needs of service users and recent trends in drug use. It has come in the wake of new patterns of commissioning and service design and to changing configurations of the workforce within the treatment system.

The first is a joint initiative of all the Colleges to define a set of core competencies that all doctors should have in working with people who use drugs or alcohol – whether they are local GPs, A&E doctors, general hospital doctors or specialists such as paediatricians or obstetricians. The result is a consensus

across all medical specialties, the GMC and other stakeholders, on what every doctor should know and be able to do to support, health and wellbeing in this area. It will also be a required part of medical training for all doctors.

The second project looks in more detail at the roles and competencies of doctors who specialise, to some degree, in working with people who use drugs and alcohol. It will define three levels of competency for doctors – specialist, intermediate and generalist – based on their training, qualifications and experience. It will map competency levels against the roles and responsibilities that these doctors may carry out. Intended for commissioners, managers and clinicians, it is a collaboration between the Royal Colleges of General Practitioners and of Psychiatrists to thoroughly revise and update their 2005 guidance document on this subject.

Part of the project's aim is to define the important role that specialists have in delivering high quality, cost-effective care that achieves positive outcomes and successfully manages risk. It will ensure that drug and alcohol users have access

to the medical expertise they need in order to recover.

The project will address the need for more specialist doctors to have a full range of skills to provide psychological and social support as an integral part of working towards optimal health and wellbeing. The new document will aim to develop and spread best practice, by clarifying for commissioners and others what they can expect of doctors working in the treatment system. Importantly, this should include the ways in which doctors can and should contribute to ensuring that a high quality service is being delivered and is providing the right support and care to everyone, especially those with the most severe and complex needs.

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