

NCAS service to General Dental Council Briefing Paper

Introduction

This briefing paper has been written to inform the NHS and the dental profession of work which is being undertaken by the National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS) in providing an assessment service to the General Dental Council (GDC). This means that the GDC is able to commission NCAS to conduct a clinical assessment of a dentist on its behalf. This service is in addition to, and separate from, the service that NCAS currently provides to healthcare organisations throughout the United Kingdom.

NCAS will provide an assessment service for the GDC as part of the Council's new procedures to tackle poor performance in dentistry. The GDC was given new powers from July 2006, which strengthened its procedures for deciding whether a registrant's fitness to practise is impaired through misconduct or ill health and also establish new procedures for considering poor performance.

NCAS assessments for the GDC consist of a core standard clinical assessment. The assessors conducting the assessments are drawn from NCAS' trained and experienced dental/medical and lay assessors. Once an assessment has been carried out, NCAS will report its findings to the GDC. The GDC will consider the report as part of a range of evidence in establishing whether or not a registrant's fitness to practise is impaired by means of deficient clinical performance. NCAS assessors may also be called upon to explain the assessment findings at a GDC fitness to practise hearing but the decision about a dentist's fitness to practise will remain the sole responsibility of the GDC. The commissioned service became available from 1 August 2006.

The service provided to the GDC is different from the assessment service NCAS provides to healthcare organisations. The GDC commissioned assessment does not include occupational health or behavioural assessments. Nor does the commissioned assessment include any recommendations from NCAS as it is for the GDC to determine fitness to practise, and the action that needs to be taken in the light of its decision.

The design of an NCAS assessment takes account of international best practice, builds on the experience of the development and implementation of the General Medical Council's approach to Performance Assessment introduced in 1997⁽¹⁾ and meets the standards required of an assessment system described by Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board⁽²⁾.

NCAS has very deliberately focussed on the assessment of performance (what the dentist actually does) rather than competence (what he/she knows)⁽³⁾. The assessment is undertaken in the dentist's normal workplace and uses the judgement of peers to build up the evidence on which to describe areas of strength and areas requiring improvement, rather than the collection of quantitative numerical data.

The assessment covers the whole field of practice and takes account of, but does not focus on, the areas of concern.

In addition to the service for the GDC, NCAS continues to support healthcare organisations handling concerns about the performance of NHS dentists, by providing advice, undertaking assessments and making recommendations to help resolve the concerns.

Background

The National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS) is a division of the National Patient Safety Agency. NCAS works with health organisations and individual practitioners where there is concern about the performance of a dentist or doctor (practitioner). NCAS provides a service to NHS England by statute and to the national health services in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales through service agreements under the relevant Acts of devolution. In addition, NCAS has formal agreements in place with the Isle of Man, Defence Medical Services and Independent Health Care Advisory Service.

Most of the concerns referred to NCAS relate to clinical performance, but often the problem involves health or behavioural issues.

NCAS helps to clarify the concerns, understand what is leading to them and support their resolution

- Provides expert advice and signposting to other resources
- Provides specialist interventions such as performance assessments and back to work support
- Offers an action planning service to underpin remediation programmes
- Offers a educational and mediated solutions
- Supports local procedures, for example PASS schemes

NCAS' recommendations are advisory only. Once an assessment has been completed NCAS will make practical recommendations to the dentist and the referring body to resolve the problems identified. NCAS helps the dentist and referring body to develop an action plan which sets out objectives, milestones and review arrangements.

Working with dentists lies at the heart of what NCAS does. The confidence of dentists in NCAS is crucial to its success. NCAS' assessment framework only works with the cooperation of the profession as a whole and crucially with that of the individual dentist concerned.

How can I find out more?

For more information about NCAS' service to the GDC or any other services to the NHS please contact: Louise Adams, Development Manager (telephone number 020 7062 1702) who will be pleased to help you. Presentations can be arranged to groups who wish to learn more about NCAS services.

References

1. Southgate L, Cox J, Hatch D, Howes A, Johnston N, McAvoy P et al. The General Medical Councils Performance Procedures: peer review of performance in the workplace. *Med Educ* 2001 Dec; 35 Suppl 1:9 – 19
2. Southgate L, Grant J. Principles for an assessment system for postgraduate medical training: A working paper. 2004 Sept
3. Miller GE. The assessment of clinical skills/competence/performance. *Academic Medicine (Suppl)* 1990;65: 563-7