

GENERAL DENTAL COUNCIL



GDC

protecting patients,  
regulating the dental team

## General Dental Council (UK)

# Response to the European Commission Consultation regarding Community action on health services

January 2007

Contact:

Kristina Kidmose Ireland  
Stakeholder Relations Manager  
General Dental Council  
44 Baker Street  
London W1U 7BE  
U.K.

Telephone: + 44 (0)20 7009 2747

Email: [kkireland@gdc-uk.org](mailto:kkireland@gdc-uk.org)

## Introduction

1. The General Dental Council (UK) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Commission's consultation on health services in the European Union. Professional mobility within the European Community presents a number of challenges and opportunities which the consultation offers an opportunity to address. We hope our comments are a helpful contribution to that debate.

## Who we are

2. The General Dental Council (GDC) is the regulatory body for dental professionals in the UK. All dentists, dental hygienists, dental therapists, clinical dental technicians and orthodontic therapists must be registered with us to work in the UK. From 31 July 2008 all dental nurses and dental technicians must also be registered with the GDC to work in the UK.
3. We work with the public and the profession to protect and promote patient safety through effective regulation of dental professionals in the UK. We:
  - register qualified dental professionals
  - set standards of dental practice and conduct
  - assure the quality of dental education
  - ensure professionals keep up-to-date through CPD
  - help patients with complaints about a dental professional
  - are working to strengthen patient protection

More information about our work can be found on our website:

[www.gdc-uk.org](http://www.gdc-uk.org)

## Ensuring Patient Safety in the EU

4. The protection, promotion and maintenance of the health and safety of the public must be at the centre of good healthcare regulation in Europe.
5. Dental professional mobility is largely dealt with in the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications (Directive 2005/36/EC). However, there remain areas to be addressed.
6. The proactive exchange of information amongst regulators is essential to ensure the easy and safe facilitation of cross-border movement of healthcare professionals. Patients will need to be assured of the continuing fitness to practise of a healthcare professional and this assurance can be achieved through effective exchange of fitness to practise information amongst competent authorities across the EU. Healthcare professionals will benefit from the efficient exchange of information amongst regulators (in terms of qualification and current professional status) towards obtaining registration in another Member State.
7. The Directive<sup>1</sup> sets out that regulators must cooperate closely on information exchange but this provision needs to be strengthened to effectively ensure patient protection. Dental professionals are sometimes registered in more than one Member State simultaneously and, where things go wrong, competent authorities must therefore exchange information proactively about the individual's fitness to practise. We strongly support the Health Professionals Crossing Borders project - developed through the collaboration

---

<sup>1</sup> Article 56.2 of Directive 2005/36/EC

of competent authorities of health professions from all Member States – which represents a consensus view on the need for proactive sharing of fitness to practise information amongst regulatory bodies. We would now welcome a formalisation at EU level of this obligation on regulators.

8. **The Commission's health initiative provides an opportunity to place a legal obligation on regulatory bodies across the EU to proactively share fitness to practise information.**
9. Patients need to have clarity about regulatory responsibility when accessing healthcare either in their home or in another Member State to know who to contact to check a professional's registration status or to pursue a complaint. The competent authorities must have the ability to require registration of all professionals practising within their territory in order to ensure the professional is within the regulatory jurisdiction and that there is clarity about regulatory responsibility for the professional's activities, professional standards, and for investigating and acting upon complaints.
10. **Regulatory bodies must be able to require registration of all professionals providing services within their jurisdiction whether the provision of service is of a temporary or 'permanent' nature.**
11. Patients will need sufficient information available to them to be able to make a choice about whether to seek healthcare in another member state. In a regulatory context, this will include information about registration status, professional standard, professional indemnity, scope of practice and how to pursue a complaint should things go wrong. The GDC publishes this information on its website and believes all dental regulators in Europe should make such information public in this or a similar way.
12. **The facilitation of patient and professional mobility requires a range of information to be made easily available to the public such as registration, professional indemnity, complaints mechanisms, professional standards, and scope of practice.**
13. Good communications skills are essential, particularly for health professionals who will need to obtain informed consent for treatment from patients who are often vulnerable. Most dental professionals are working independently so a system of relying on the employer to ensure sufficient communication and language skills would not be relevant.
14. **The Commission's health initiative provides an opportunity to address this important issue towards ensuring patient safety. We would like to see provisions which would enable regulatory body to test language competency at point of registration.**

#### **Response to the individual consultation questions**

15. Our comments on the individual questions in the consultation paper are reflected in the detailed response submitted by the Alliance of UK Healthcare Regulators on Europe (AURE) of whom we are a member (a copy of the response is enclosed). We also support the statement submitted by the Healthcare Professions Crossing Borders initiative and the response of the Council of European Dentists (CED).

This paper represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumer Protection DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.