

UKPHR response to Health Select Committee's view on the regulation of public health specialists

The UK Public Health Register (UKPHR) welcomes the view taken by the Select Committee on Health regarding the regulation of the Specialist Public Health Workforce. Public Health as a profession draws on a wide range of disciplines, not just medicine. Although many of these professions are regulated in their own right, public health adds significant complexity.

UKPHR believes that Specialist regulation requires a robust, unified system designed to secure the registration and revalidation of all Public Health Specialists, not just those with a background in medicine or dentistry. The UKPH Register has long argued that it has the experience and specialist knowledge to fulfil such a role.

UKPHR's current requirements for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Revalidation are given force by the agreement of employers to restrict recruitment to those on the UK's Public Health Registers (held currently by the General Dental and Medical Councils and UKPHR). All such registrants will have demonstrated their proven competence either by completing a five year training programme or by rigorous assessment of past and current professional practice. This guarantees equivalent knowledge and competency, irrespective of the route to registration. The Select Committee's recommendations provide an opportunity to remove any confusion and ambiguity around current regulatory arrangements.

The Select Committee has rightly observed that Public Health draws upon skills from epidemiology, economics, medicine, social science, pharmacy, health education and informatics, to name but a few. Robust and simple registration arrangements will also help to achieve many other recommendations included in the Health Select Committee's report and, in so doing, provide added protection for both the public and employers. Incorporating all specialists within a single regulatory system will guarantee common standards and ensure that there is a shared code of practice. It will reinforce the focus on health improvement and protection, as well as help the NHS and local authorities provide the best and most cost effective services designed to meet the population health needs of local communities. We hope that changes in the regulation of such professionals will secure a common system of regulation for this important specialty.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS:

1. The UK Public Health Register (UKPHR) is the independent regulator for the public health workforce in the UK. It operates a register accredited by Professional Standards Authority for professionals who work in public health. It is a Registered Charity.
2. UKPHR has been registering public health specialists since 2003. In more recent times UKPHR has commenced registration in respect of public health practitioners and Public Health Specialty Registrars.
3. The public health workforce is multi-disciplinary and employers, including local authorities can look to registration as an assurance of competence.
4. UKPHR regulates over half of all Directors of Public Health in England and a large number of Consultants in Public Health working in local authorities and Public Health England. It regulates and registers both Public Health Specialists and an increasing number of Public Health Practitioners throughout the UK.
5. The main purpose of the regulation of members of the public health workforce is to protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public. Regulation is important to protect the public, individually and collectively, from bad, harmful and professionally unacceptable public health practice. UKPHR achieves this by ensuring registrants achieve and maintain requisite standards of competence, knowledge and experience as well as adhere to agreed standards of ethical practice.

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