

8 December 2023

Miss C E Henley
Assistant Coroner
Newcastle Upon Tyne and North Tyneside


gmc-uk.org


Dear Miss Henley

Preventing future death report (Tyler Ryan), coroner case reference: 

We share your concern about the shortage of paediatric pathologists. We recognise the significance of this issue in light of the tragic circumstances of Tyler Jay Ryan's untimely death, and especially the concerns of his family.

You have asked us to set out the actions we will take to address the concern you have raised, or to explain why we do not propose to take action.

GMC's role

The GMC, as the statutory regulator for the medical profession, does not have a direct role in the recruitment or retention of doctors across any specialty in the UK. This is exclusively a matter for the NHS in each of the four UK countries. Similarly, although we have responsibility for the oversight of postgraduate medical training, we have no role in determining how many doctors are trained in any specialty or subspecialty. These numbers are set by each of the UK governments in conjunction with the NHS in each of the countries. We're not therefore in a position to take specific action to secure numbers of doctor in this speciality, or in any others.

However, we do have responsibility for the registration processes through which suitably qualified doctors obtain the legal right to practise in the UK, or (in the case of specialist registration) demonstrate that they have completed specialist training across all recognised specialties. How effective we are at managing those processes clearly does have a direct bearing on the how readily the UK workforce can attract and absorb the doctors required to meet ever-increasing and more complex service needs. We're committed, as a matter of priority, to making our registration pathways as flexible and accessible as we can for all those doctors who meet the required standards to join and remain in the UK medical workforce.

Specialist registration

Particularly relevant here, perhaps, is the work we're doing to make specialist registration more accessible to those who are suitably qualified, but who have not completed an approved training course in the UK. We have long sought, and have now obtained, a change to our legislation to make it less prescriptive about the evidence requirements to support an application for specialist

recognition. Our further ambition is to develop and implement a number of new pathways to the specialist register. In doing so, we'll aim to widen access to potential applicants by offering a range of options and mechanisms through which they can demonstrate they have the required knowledge, skills and experience to practise at consultant level in the NHS.

Doctors trained outside the UK

We particularly value the contribution that overseas-trained doctors make to the UK medical workforce, and we registered over 14,000 international medical graduates last year. Our own recent research – published in [The state of medical education and practice workforce report 2023](#) – clearly shows the crucial part they play, and are likely to continue playing, in ensuring a sustainable workforce in UK healthcare.

In recent years we've invested in additional facilities and people to offer a record number of places in both parts of the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) test, which is the means by which many international medical graduates can demonstrate their knowledge and skills for registration purposes. In 2022 over 14,000 doctors sat PLAB 1 and over 13,500 doctors sat PLAB 2, which were significant increases compared to previous years. The number of places this year is around 23,000 for PLAB 1 and 16,000 places for PLAB 2 respectively.

Beyond that, we also have number of programmes underway aimed at streamlining our registration processes. I recognise that none of this amounts to assurance about specific vacancies being filled. But I hope it shows our ongoing commitment to providing effective channels into the UK medical workforce.

UK medical graduates

With regard to UK medical students and graduates, there may be some work to do – perhaps by the medical schools, the NHS and the Royal College of Pathologists – in promoting careers in pathology and related sub-specialities. The data we have collected shows that there has been an increase of 29% of trainees in pathology programmes between 2018 and 2022. This appears quite encouraging and suggests that the broad field at least is of interest to junior doctors.

I hope this is helpful, and I will of course be happy to provide any further information or clarifications you may need.

Yours sincerely



**Director
Registration and Revalidation**