New special measures and inspection regime for GP practices

In October 2014, the following new regulatory changes affecting GP practices will be introduced:

- using the new inspection regime, the Care Quality Commission will begin to rate 8,000 NHS GP practices on the basis of whether they are: outstanding, good, require improvement or inadequate; and
- the pilot of a new special measures regime, developed by CQC and NHS England with the aim of ensuring that practices are not allowed to continue to provide inadequate care to patients indefinitely, will begin.

CQC Inspections

GP practices will be rated against five key questions:

1. Are they safe?
2. Are they effective?
3. Are they caring?
4. Are they responsive?
5. Are they well led?

Practices will also be rated by reference to six specific population groups - older people, people with long term conditions, mothers babies and children, working age people, people living in vulnerable circumstances including people with a learning disability and people experiencing poor mental health, including dementia.

Following inspection, each practice will be given a rating of outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. The CQC has committed to inspect and rate all GP services by March 2016. GP practices rated as inadequate for one or more of the five key questions or six population groups will be given a specified time period for improvement pending re-inspection, not less than six months after the initial rating is confirmed. At the re-inspection the practice must demonstrate improvement.

Special measures

If a practice is re-inspected, but has failed to make sufficient improvement and therefore retains its inadequate rating for any key question or population group, it will be placed into “special measures”. CQC will consult with NHS England before placing any practice into special measures.

The current proposals also give the CQC an emergency power to place a practice into special measures, without an initial six month improvement period, where patients are at risk or CQC has no confidence that the practice can improve on its own.

For further information relating to this update, please contact:

Sam Hopkins
Partner
London
020 8780 4776
sam.hopkins@capsticks.com

James Atkins
Senior Lawyer
Leeds
0113 322 5572
james.atkins@capsticks.com
Practices will be placed into special measures for a maximum of six months. During that period, CQC expects that an intensive package of peer support will be available to the practice, developed in conjunction with the Royal College of General Practitioners.

CQC will re-inspect the practice at the end of the special measures period. If the practice has not improved, and continues to provide inadequate care, it may have its CQC registration cancelled.

The CQC has a wide range of regulatory enforcement powers open to it which include the power to issue warning notices and compliance actions and to place conditions on the registration of a provider.

*How Capsticks can help*

If you have any queries about the proposed regulatory changes affecting GP practices, or would like any assistance with these matters, whether as a provider or commissioner of primary care, please do contact Sam Hopkins, James Atkins or Ian Cooper.