

Originally sent October 12, 2009

Resignation letter to the Royal College of General Practitioners

Dear Professor Field

I am writing to inform you that I will not be renewing my membership to the College after April next year. As a grassroots GP who was pleased to join the RCGP on qualification, it has become increasingly apparent that the College no longer represents the interests of its members, and instead chooses, along with the GMC and the BMA, to become a further arm to the government. At a time when general practice is facing unprecedented hostility from so many quarters, I do not see my Royal College defending my profession against such unwarranted attacks.

Your latest 'guide' on revalidation has been the final straw for me. Along the way there has been your unswerving support for the latest government fad, with examples such as Darzi, hotel style practice ratings, the summary care record and practice boundaries amongst others.

The aims of revalidation are laudable, namely to ensure that doctors are kept up to date, fit to practise, safe to patients and, most ostensibly, to prevent another Dr Shipman.

However, despite Shipman's best efforts, being the isolated psychopathic serial killer that he was, doctors in general, and family doctors in particular, remain the most trusted of all professionals amongst the public, yet you seem willing to undermine such trust by exposing all of us to the scrutiny of revalidation.

I have yet to see people in your position, as professionals with a scientific background, provide any solid evidence base that reinforcing a tick box culture and an educationalist approach will prevent another Shipman. I have also yet to see any sensible validated figures on the impact of the additional administrative workload of revalidation upon already pressured direct patient contact time.

You, along with the government, seem to have singularly failed to grasp the very essence of what it takes to be a professional, one who has trained for a significant part of their working lives, and who continues to have a philosophy of life-long learning with a strive towards quality. This is in fact an intrinsic part of the majority of us. It cannot always be measured, and doesn't constantly have to be tested and scrutinised to see if it is there. In fact the more it is analysed and controlled, the less the professionalism. It seems that the government, in failing to recognise the value of a doctor, has reduced all of my functions into a simple open-all-hours bean-counting conveyor-belt processing robot with a mind only to ensuring consumerist satisfaction above all else, and as one who really should know better, you have gone along with it all.

The doctors I know are hard-working individuals who are always aiming for the best outcome for their patients, who just want to be left alone to do their job – a job that they do remarkably well, remarkably quietly and remarkably efficiently, even in the face of massive pressures both external to their jobs and as part of it.

Yes, we sometimes mess up, as humans do, but there are already many existing procedures in place should one start to under-perform. As you know, we already have to answer to, amongst others, ourselves (as professionals with a vocation and a conscience), our patients, our peers, our business partners, the clinical governance leads in practice, our appraisers, along with medical directors, complaints departments, prescribing advisors and clinical governance departments at our PCTs, the Care Quality Commission and the GMC.

Yet, as well as the above, you now seem to want us all to answer to the whims of anonymous patients, staff and possibly all and sundry, our own GPs, responsible officers at the PCT, RCGP external assessors, lay assessors, National Adjudication Panels, GMC affiliates, but perhaps above all, we will all be needing to answer to the God of Paper – whom we will be worshipping in order to show that we are all 'good doctors'.

Despite your promises to consult the profession and the College's need to be involved at the outset and shape an upcoming process, you are in fact imposing an onerous top-down evidence-free system which in the end will reassure no-one, yet put many doctors under undue pressure with very little gain.

When we discuss revalidation in practice, three of my six partners joke openly about retiring before revalidation fully reaches them, yet I know full well they are being serious. The thing is, they are all well below formal retirement age. What you leave us with, will be a group of disillusioned highly trained puppets without an ounce of professionalism within them – if this is what you want from the General Practice in the NHS, then carry on, but you will not be doing it with my support.

Yours sincerely

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