

PRESS RELEASE



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RISK AWARE DOCTORS SPARK BIG JUMP IN ADVICE CALLS

Doctors becoming more "risk aware" in light of recent high-profile cases such as Baby P has sparked a big increase in calls reported by the medical defence organisation MDDUS during the last year.

The MDDUS team of medical advisers handled a record total of 7,060 calls seeking help in 2009, up more than 11 per cent on the year before.

The organisation says one reason for the jump in call numbers is that doctors are being more proactive in seeking advice at an early stage about potential problems.

Dr Gail Gilmartin, a senior medico-legal adviser at MDDUS, says: "We are now receiving over 135 calls a week from doctors seeking professional guidance and help.

"This is in part due to our steady growth in membership throughout the UK, but also because there is a greater awareness amongst medics that they should seek advice at the earliest possible opportunity.

"Medics are becoming much more aware of risks in part due to the media highlighting significant cases. As a result, they are coming to us for advice at an early stage, before a problem has escalated.

"Doctors often fear the worst. In many cases we can reassure them about the consequences of a particular issue and put it into perspective."

Hot topics on the MDDUS advice lines last year included subjects ranging from children issues to confidentiality and difficult patients to problems with colleagues.

The number of calls seeking advice on children issues rose by 16.4 per cent in the last year. Dr Gilmartin says: "The publicity generated by the Baby P case and other high-profile child abuse stories reported in the news has probably influenced this."

Confidentiality issues were also a "hot potato" with the number of calls on this subject up 7.5 per cent. MDDUS says doctors were influenced to seek help by the GMC's new guidance on confidentiality which came into force towards the end of 2009.

The number of contacts from doctors looking for advice on difficult patients during 2009 rose by 7 per cent. Dr Gilmartin says: "These are calls about how to manage high-demand patients whose complaints exceed what is usually expected.

"This could be linked to increased media coverage over the past year of so-called poor medical practice. Patients are being encouraged to speak up, but some simply go over the top."

Calls from medics raising issues about problems with their colleagues rose by nearly 10 per cent last year. "This increase can be put down to the fact that when people are under pressure at work – from matters like reorganisation in the NHS – colleague problems can suddenly become a big issue," says Dr Gilmartin.

The analysis of all calls handled by medical advisers during 2009 revealed the top ten reasons for MDDUS members making contact as:

1. Patient complaints: up 7 per cent.
2. Confidentiality: up 7.5 per cent.
3. Children issues: up 16.4 per cent.
4. Difficult patients: up 7.0 per cent.
5. Claims: up 26.1 per cent
6. Indemnity cover: up 19.7 per cent.
7. Colleague problem: up 9.5 per cent.
8. Records: down 10.8 per cent.
9. Miscellaneous topics: up 15.6 per cent.
10. General medical issues: down 35.1 per cent.

MDDUS is predicting a further increase in calls this year, as the trend towards risk aversion continues. As a result the medical defence organisation is currently expanding its operations into new offices in London, with three new experienced medical advisers to be based there. It is the first time that MDDUS has appointed advisers to work outside its Glasgow headquarters.

The move underlines the organisation's belief that there is a strong value to its members in having more locally-based advisers to call on.

Dr Gilmartin adds: "Our members – wherever they are based in the UK – get the very best advice. They find our service very approachable and as a result are comfortable about ringing us again in the future.

"MDDUS always provides a prompt and accurate response to all queries. We know that our members find our service immensely reassuring."

Ends

For further information contact Colin Calder on 0141 616 2677 or 07850 510881.

Note to editors

MDDUS (Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland) is a medical defence organisation providing access to professional indemnity and expert medicolegal advice for doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals throughout the UK. For further information on MDDUS go to www.mddus.com.