

# Speech: It's good to talk. It's good to listen.

New guidance for doctors about maintaining confidentiality comes into force today.

I very much welcome [this revised guidance from the General Medical Council, \(GMC\)](#) and believe it will play an important role in helping doctors to protect the relationship based on trust that is cherished by both clinicians and patients.

As patients we take for granted that we can trust our doctors with the most personal information about ourselves. We understand that they may need this in order to know how best to treat us. We expect that they will treat this information with respect.

Much of the time, the way that doctors should protect and share information to maintain this trust is straight forward. However, sometimes both doctors and patients find that the situation is more complicated.

How about the family of an elderly patient who want to talk about their concerns, and possible treatments, with a doctor, but the patient does not have the capacity to consent to the doctor discussing their case? How about when a doctor is told by a mother that her partner has been violent and she fears for the safety of her children? What is a doctor's duty when the police want to know something about a patient to help with an investigation? How should a doctor proceed when she thinks that a patient's health means he shouldn't be driving anymore? This document provides clear guidance to help doctors navigate such challenges.

Considering this revised guidance reminds me of the phrase "It's good to talk". This applies to the process that the GMC has gone through to ensure that the guidance serves the needs of clinicians and patients. I commend the extensive and careful engagement it has undertaken.

The guidance itself rightly lays emphasis on the importance of talking, and listening, to patients so that they know what they can expect to happen to information about them – who will see it, why and what choices they have. And it clarifies that confidentiality is not in itself a reason to refuse to listen to family and friends and doing so can be helpful to the patient's care, for example providing additional insights into a patient's condition.

It remains as vital as ever that people can talk in confidence to their doctors. New challenges to that trusted relationship will emerge with time, but we protect when we as patients, doctors, others in the health and care system continue to talk to each other.