

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

67% of GPs are fearful of being sued by patients

A Medical Protection Society (MPS) survey of 600 GP members reveals that 67% of respondents are fearful of being sued by patients.¹ Of those, 85% feel that the fear of being sued impacts on the way they practise.

This fear is not without foundation as MPS' analysis of claims shows that GPs are more likely to be sued now than ever before. The survey found that 35% of respondents had received a claim and 58% knew a colleague who had, with those who had received a claim stating that it impacted on their stress/anxiety (89%), morale (86%), confidence (74%) and health and wellbeing (63%).

Dr Rob Hendry, Medical Director at the Medical Protection Society said:

"We know England has a target to recruit 8,000 new full time equivalent GPs by 2020 and we believe that this is going to be a struggle.² GPs are facing immense pressures, including increasing demand, complex guidance, rising patient expectations and a stream of negative media coverage.

"It is not just if a GP is sued directly, but their experience of seeing colleagues go through the process that can cause anxiety, affect their confidence and make them overly cautious. This comes at the same time as our own analysis shows that a full-time UK GP is expected to be twice as likely to receive a claim from their work this year as they were just seven years ago.³"

The respondents stated that the fear of being sued affected the way they practise by conducting more investigations (72%) and often working beyond contracted hours (59%). Furthermore, this fear impacts by ensuring they keep detailed medical records (85%), being more careful to ensure follow-up arrangements are in place (79%) and being open about mistakes (40%).

Dr Rob Hendry continued:

"It is absolutely right that GPs should ensure they follow correct processes and be open if things go wrong, but we don't want GPs to be in a situation where they have to change their practice and work longer hours due to a fear of litigation. If we are to recruit and retain GPs then we must tackle the culture of fear that GPs are currently working in. We must give them back the confidence in their abilities and allow them to do what they do best – providing patients with excellent care.

"Mistakes happen; no one is infallible. While it may be true that doctors should expect to receive and act upon more complaints about their care, it cannot be right that they work in fear of litigation. In this tough environment, we remind members that we are by their side at every step of their career, offering advice and education – we are much more than a last line of defence."

For further information or to arrange an interview please contact Kim Watson, Media Relations Manager at MPS on +44 (0) 207 399 1428 or kim.watson@mps.org.uk

Notes to editors

1. MPS conducted a survey of GP members to find out about their experience and awareness of claims for clinical negligence and how it had impacted on them. The survey ran from 3 February 2015 to 10 February 2015 and received 600 responses.
2. RCGP (8 February 2015) 'New league table reveals GP shortages across England'
<http://www.rcgp.org.uk/news/2015/february/new-league-table-reveals-gp-shortages-across-england.aspx>

3. This is based on full-time UK GPs based outside of Scotland.

About MPS

MPS is the world's leading protection organisation for doctors, dentists and healthcare professionals. We protect and support the professional interests of more than 290,000 members around the world. Our benefits include access to indemnity, expert advice and peace of mind. Highly qualified advisers are on hand to talk through a question or concern at any time.

Our in-house experts assist with the wide range of legal and ethical problems that arise from professional practice. This includes clinical negligence claims, complaints, medical and dental council inquiries, legal and ethical dilemmas, disciplinary procedures, inquests and fatal accident inquiries.

Our philosophy is to support safe practice in medicine and dentistry by helping to avert problems in the first place. We do this by promoting risk management through our workshops, E-learning, clinical risk assessments, publications, conferences, lectures and presentations.

MPS is not an insurance company. All the benefits of membership of MPS are discretionary as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association.