



# Communication from a Regulatory Perspective

Mr Bill Prasifka  
Medical Council CEO



Comhairle na nDochtúirí Leighis  
Medical Council

# Medical Council



- The Medical Council is the regulatory body for doctors. It has a statutory role in protecting the public by promoting the highest professional standards amongst doctors practising in the Republic of Ireland.
- Maintains the Register of Medical Practitioners.
- Sets the standards for medical education and training in Ireland. Oversees lifelong and learning and skills development throughout doctors' professional careers through its professional competence requirements.
- Where the public may make a complaint against a doctor.
- Governed by Medical Practitioners Act 2007.



“Good communication... is central to the doctor-patient relationship and essential to the effective functioning of healthcare teams”

## Communication complaints as seen in the 2017 annual report & current efforts

Complaints received by the Medical Council about doctors are broken down into 44 different categories, however **19% of all complaints** fell into the category of **communications** in 2017.

Issues of poor communication are not acceptable - either to the patient or the Medical Council.

The Medical Council is dedicated to improving the patient experience by supporting doctors to deliver the highest standards of care. It is clear that we need to put a particular focus on communications at this current time.

We are developing a number of new initiatives to support doctors by providing additional guidance to further enhance good communication skills with patients and their families.



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# What is a Communications Complaint?



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- a misunderstanding
- a miscommunication
- not explaining a diagnosis or treatment plan in an understandable or clear manner
- a disagreement
- a personality clash

# Public Opinion Research



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In January 2018 as part of public opinion research\* a sample size of 1,000 people answered the following when asked “When would you make a complaint about a consultation with a Doctor?”

- If the doctor was not polite/respectful when he/she spoke to you?
  - 44% would make a complaint
  - 41% would not complain
  - 15% were unsure

*\*Public opinion research carried out by Behaviours and Attitude on behalf of the Medical Council in January 2018.*

# When asked who they would complain to they answered:



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60% to the doctor(s)  
themselves

18% another doctor/  
healthcare  
professional involved



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21% to the Medical Council



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Stáite  
Health Service Executive

10% to HSE



15% to Practise /  
employer/ hospital

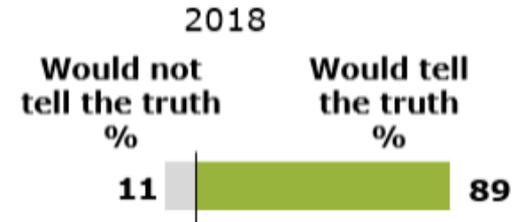
2% to Ombudsman  
2% to HIQA  
2% to other

# Trust in Doctors



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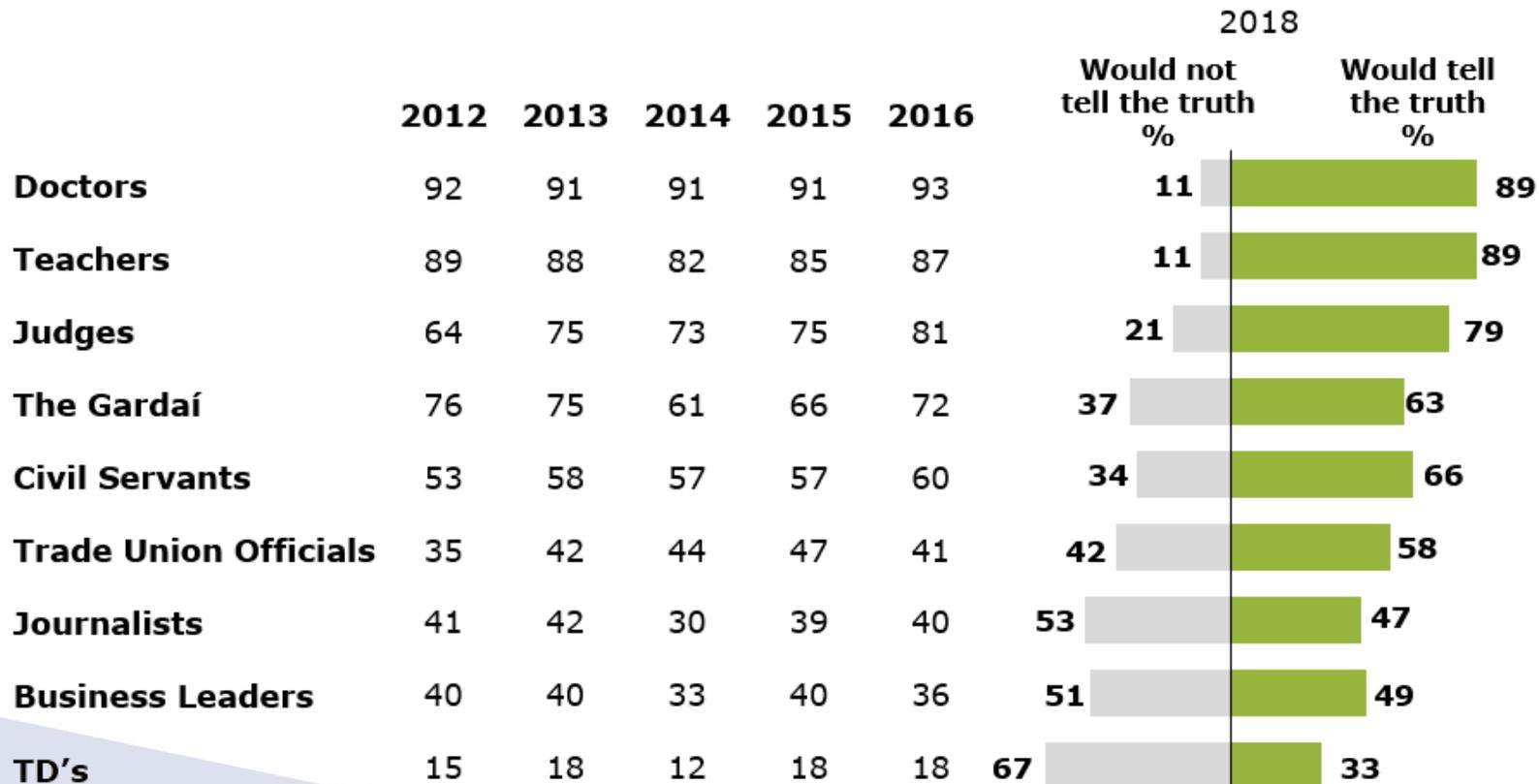
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Doctors</b>	92	91	91	91	93



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## Communication complaints & current efforts



### Safe Start

Are you a doctor who  
is new to medical  
practice in Ireland?



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The following are just some of the efforts being made to improve this area;

- The Medical Council are working with the post graduate training bodies on the development and the implementation of a number of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses for doctors covering topics like communications, open disclosure and reflective practice.
- The Medical Council's Guide to Conduct & Ethics for Medical Practitioners (8<sup>th</sup> edition, 2016) gives detailed guidance for doctors on the subject of communications.
- The Medical Council has published a new resource for doctors who are new to the practise of medicine, entitled Safe Start. The guide includes essential information on consent, prescribing, End of Life care, record keeping, and general conduct and communication skills.

# Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners



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# Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners

“Three Pillars of Professionalism – Partnership, Practice and Performance” (p10)



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- Good care depends on doctors working together with patients and colleagues toward shared aims and with mutual respect.
- Good communication involves listening to patients and colleagues, as well as giving information, explanations or advice.
- When communicating with patients, you should be honest and give all relevant information.
- You should welcome questions from patients and respond to them in an open, honest and comprehensive way.
- Trust is founded on the integrity and honesty of doctors in all aspects of their medical practice.. It also relies on truthfulness both in communication with patients and colleagues.



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**Guide** to Professional Conduct and Ethics  
**for Registered Medical Practitioners**

**8th Edition 2016**





“Good communication is  
important for doctors to diagnose  
and treat patients effectively”

Working with your doctor: useful information for patients

# Working with your doctor: useful information for patients

## The informed patient (p6)



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- Partnerships are based on good communication, trust and mutual respect.
- Doctors need to understand their patient's medical history, symptoms, lifestyle, preferences and beliefs.
- To help their doctor to do this, patients should answer their questions fully and honestly.
- Patients should be as clear as they can when giving information about their health, their concerns or worries, and their expectations.
- Doctors will give patients information. They should explain clearly their diagnosis and treatment options, and advise them on how to take any medications they have prescribed. Patients should listen carefully and ask for any extra information they need about their health, treatment options or medicines.

**The Medical Council has a statutory role in protecting the public by promoting the highest professional standards among doctors**



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### **Dealing with Complaints locally**

- Patients may want to consider making their complaint locally in the first instance, to the doctor directly or to the healthcare institution.
- Most complaints can be dealt with locally at the place where the patient received care.
- The Medical Council can only take action where complaints are of a serious nature and raise concerns over a doctor's fitness to practise.

## The Medical Council has a statutory role in protecting the public by promoting the highest professional standards among doctors



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### Mediation

- The PPC may give an opinion to Medical Council that the complaint could be resolved by mediation. The PPC may do this if it believes, after looking at the circumstances of the complaint, that it would be possible to restore the doctor-patient relationship.
- Mediation is a process where two or more people agree to the appointment of a neutral third person called a mediator to help them resolve a dispute.
- When the Medical Council gets the PPC's opinion, it can refer the complaint for mediation. This can only be done if both patient and the doctor (or doctors) agree to use mediation to resolve your complaint.
- If the Medical Council decides that your complaint could be resolved by mediation, we will write to all parties and explain how the process works.



“Dr Scally’s Report should  
lead to greater patient  
safety, improved patient  
outcomes and better patient  
experiences”

The Medical Council

## Scally Report should lead to greater patient safety, improved patient outcomes and better patient experiences

- The Medical Council welcomes Scally Report and embraces the recommendations which will drive improvements for patients and doctors alike.
- The Medical Council has decided on a series of actions to ensure the implementation of Dr Scally's report and that further improvements are made in-line with the spirit of the report's recommendations.
- The Council is developing a number of new initiatives to support doctors by providing additional guidance to further enhance good communication skills with patients and their families.



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**Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck  
Screening Programme**

**Dr Gabriel Scally**

**Final Report  
September 2018**

## **Scall Report should lead to greater patient safety, improved patient outcomes and better patient experiences**



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- We will be reviewing our Ethical Guide, not only in relation to open disclosure but also in other sections and will explore options to add further guidance to doctors.
- We have met the HSE, as the main employer, in regard to Communications training programmes and our shared concerns.
- In due course, once we have detailed our multifaceted approach to the Report, we will request to meet with some of the women and families involved and to seek their input and advice while also outlining initiatives the Medical Council will be leading or calling for.



**Health service providers, regulators, doctors, medical professionals and various other key stakeholders must now dedicate themselves to improving patient experiences and care while working towards an Ireland where no woman, man, child or family have the same experience that the brave women and families involved have had to deal with.**