

Many thanks for requesting RCGP Scotland's comments and advice on this petition. My apologies for the delay in responding. We would like to express our deepest sympathy to Ms Mackenzie in her loss and can understand her quest for lessons to be learnt to ensure others do not come to harm.

The petition calls for a duty for consultation with, and the consent of, parents and guardians before prescribing medications for mental health problems in patients under 18 years of age.

Patient confidentiality and consent

As the GMC response states, patient confidentiality is of the utmost importance in the practice of medicine. It is crucial that patients can share personal and private worries and concerns, knowing that it will not be disclosed to others unless on the most pressing occasions. I understand that the Scottish Youth Parliament has reaffirmed this position and presented evidence that lessening this confidentiality would increase the barriers to young people coming forward and potentially increasing the risk to young patients. RCGP Scotland is fully committed to following GMC guidance on confidentiality as described in their publications. These guidelines stress the importance of encouraging young people to involve their parents and others close to them in their care. This is an important part of the usual care for patients with mental health needs.

Treatment of young patients with mental health conditions

General Practice has a crucial role as a default first point of contact for patients with all ill health presentations. GPs often know the young person well and may have knowledge of their family and community. They are able to co-ordinate care and have the ability to deal with biological, social and psychological issues. RCGP Scotland believes that medication can have an important role to play but that it should not take the place of other, less intensive treatment options if they are available.

RCGP Scotland is concerned that lack of investment in general practice means GPs have insufficient time to properly assess and treat this important patient group. The need for comprehensive follow-up arrangements makes further demands on GP capacity when managing patients with these conditions.

We support the Scottish Youth Parliament's view of the importance of social prescribing and the move to the provision of 'Links workers' to help navigate patients to this means of support. We note, however, that as yet very few practices have the benefit of Links workers. At other times, GPs may find themselves requiring to involve additional services to meet patients' needs. Often there is lack of clarity with 16 year olds whether they are to be managed by adult or children's services and services can be difficult to access with delays in patients being seen. RCGP Scotland has been pressing for improvements in the interface between GPs and the rest of the health and social care system and this is a case where improved systems of inter-professional clinical decision support would streamline care and improve outcomes.

Summary

- The present arrangements regarding confidentiality and consent underpin the effective and safe delivery of care to young people
- GPs have a key role in the care of young people with mental health problems but must have the investment and time to undertake this important work
- The development of other treatment modalities in primary care, such as Links Workers, is a priority
- Continuing attention to the interfaces within the health and social care service will streamline care and improve patient outcomes.