EMBARGOED UNTIL 08.00 14th November 2024

New analysis shows scale of sexual misconduct concerns in health and care professions

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the regulator of 15 health and care professions across the UK, has today released new analysis highlighting the number of fitness to practise concerns raised relating to sexual misconduct.

The report shows that, while less than one percent of HCPC registrants have any type of FTP concern raised about them in any one year, 1 in 12 of those concerns mentioned sexual misconduct or sexual offences.

Christine Elliott, Chair of the HCPC, said:

“Everyone has the right to feel safe and have their boundaries respected. Sexual violence and misconduct perpetrated by health and care professionals must not be tolerated, and we should all call it out.

“Every dreadful experience must be investigated to understand what more can be done to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

“Health and care professionals have a duty to speak up and act on concerns about safety and when they witness behaviours that are wrong. Employers must show leadership and be role models to create the right culture and safer environments.

“As a regulator, we have a significant part to play in informing behaviours, through setting clear standards and dealing with concerns reported to us. We should also encourage better collaboration across the whole health and care system.”

The HCPC data shows:

- There were 163 fitness to practise concerns raised with the regulator relating to sexual misconduct or criminal matters or conduct of a sexual nature in 2023-24.
- 1 in 12 of all concerns raised with the HCPC about health and care professionals mentioned sexual misconduct or sexual offences.
- 13 out of 15 professions regulated by the HCPC had concerns about sexual misconduct or criminality.
- There is a higher risk presented by male practitioners and that risk generally increased with age.
- There were higher rates of concerns in certain professions, including paramedics, physiotherapists and operating department practitioners.

The HCPC has recently launched new online resources to provide further support to victims, survivors and witnesses of sexual misconduct, harassment and abuse.

Bernie O’Reilly, Chief Executive and Registrar of the HCPC said:

“Any form of sexual misconduct is unacceptable. The vast majority of our registrants act appropriately and will be rightly horrified at the reports of sexual misconduct or criminality.

“Our data shows that there are a small number of reported incidents of this nature among the health and care professionals we regulate, but even one case is one too many.

"People don't behave poorly because they weren't sure of the standard or policy. They behave poorly because it has gone unchallenged. People drive behaviour and leaders must create an environment where people feel safe to speak up.

“Professionals deserve to be able to work safely, and patients and service users should be able to access their services confident that they will be safe and will receive the right standards of care.”

The sexual safety hub, which has been co-produced with victims of sexual attacks, will raise awareness of the impact of sexual misconduct, and help improve the safety of service users, as well as those working in and joining the health and social care workforce.

It includes details on how anyone can raise concerns directly with the regulator and signposts existing resources provided by other organisations.

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Notes to editors:

1. The new sexual safety hub brings together existing and new materials for service users, members of the public, registrants, employers and education providers.

2. The Health and Care Professions Council is the largest multi-profession health and care regulator in the UK. We regulate 15 health and care professions in the UK and over 340,000 professionals, working in the NHS and broader health and care settings. Our role is to protect the public and support high quality care.

   We do this by:
   - setting standards for professionals' education and training and practice;
   - approving programmes which professionals must complete to register with us;
   - keeping a Register of professionals, known as 'registrants', who meet our
   - standards; and
   - taking action if professionals on our Register do not meet our standards.