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Synopsis

Witness to Harm-Holding to Account. Improving patient, family and colleague experiences of Fitness to Practise proceedings: A mixed-methods study

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Published December 2025

DOI: 10.3310/SSPP1118

Volume 13 • Issue 44

Plain language summary

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Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2025; Vol. 13: No. 44

DOI: 10.3310/SSPP1118

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain language summary

This study is about how the public are involved in the regulation of health and social care professionals in the United Kingdom. Over 2 million professionals (e.g. doctors and social workers) are registered by law with their regulator. If their behaviour is substandard, they can be investigated. In the most serious cases, this might include a public hearing where a decision will be made about whether they can continue to practise. This process is called fitness to practise. We know the process is stressful for professionals. We wanted to find out how the process works for the public, who may be involved by raising a concern and by giving evidence at a hearing. We focused on people who may have been harmed by professionals, because little is known about their experiences of fitness to practise.

We examined the information for the public on 13 regulators' websites. We undertook a survey of people who had raised a concern, and we interviewed people who had been part of a hearing. We examined documents, including witness statements, legal documents and policies, and we observed hearings. We interviewed the public, lawyers and independent hearing panel members. We held four workshops to coproduce our recommendations with members of the public, regulators, health, social care, lawyers and academics.

We found that most of the regulators' websites presented too much or too little information, which was too complex, in inaccessible formats and made the process of navigating the website difficult. Members of the public who had been harmed and who raised a concern and took part in investigations and hearings mainly found the process to be onerous, protracted, distressing and disappointing. We found regulators and employers often did not offer enough support to the public. We produced recommendations and resources to improve these processes.