

Advertising by doctors

Members often ask Medisec whether they can advertise their practice. Informing the public about medical procedures is important.

When considering the question of advertising, doctors must comply with section 44 of the Medical Council *Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners* (available on the Medical Council website).

The text of the relevant paragraph is set out below, followed by queries frequently raised.

44 Provision of information to the public and advertising

44.1 Information about medical services published in the media, internet or other means is generally in the public interest provided the information is factually accurate, evidence based and not misleading.

44.2 You must include your Medical Council registration number in your letter headings, medical prescriptions and all other documentation and records (paper or electronic) related to your practice, and in any information you publish about your practice or services. Your letter headings should not include membership of associations or societies other than those recognised or accredited by appropriate training bodies. Information about your practice or services should also explain that doctors may only practise in countries in which they are registered.

44.3 You may advertise your practice by publicising the name and address of the practice, the practice hours and contact details. You may only include your area of specialty if it is one that is recognised by the Medical Council and you are entered for that specialty in the Specialist Division of the Register. You may display a professional plate and sign at your place of practice indicating your registered name, registered qualifications or international equivalents, and registered specialties. The plate may also indicate hours of attendance, telephone numbers, services you provide and details of emergency services.

44.4 If you want to publish more information about the services you provide, you must make sure the information is true and verifiable, does not make false claims or does not have the potential to raise unrealistic expectations. For example, you should avoid using photographic or other illustrations of the human body to promote cosmetic or plastic surgery procedures as they may raise unrealistic expectations among potential patients. You should include information about any risks associated with the services you provide.

44.5 The fees you charge should be appropriate to the service you provide. You should tell patients before the consultation and treatment what the costs are likely to be.

In addition, consultants should ensure that:

1. information, such as surgical outcomes, is evidence based, factually accurate and not misleading
2. information provided is true and verifiable, and does not make false claims or have the potential to raise unrealistic patient expectations
3. details such as qualifications, experience and membership of professional bodies are correct.

Doctors should be aware that they will be held personally responsible for the nature and content of all advertising relating to their services, including any advertising undertaken by a third party using their name. This also relates to all verbal and written statements on websites and social media sites.

Frequently asked questions:

Can a doctor advertise to inform the public of a re-location of their practice?

As above, you can advertise your -services by publicising the name and address of your consulting rooms, availability and contact details. However, you should ensure that any advertisement is factually, accurate and not misleading.

Can a doctor advertise their practice on the same flyer as a Pharmacy or a private clinic?

Yes, but you should be aware of any potential conflicts of interest. The Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners (Amended) 8th Edition (2019) states that you must not let financial considerations influence or appear to influence your management of patients. You must tell patients about any beneficial interest you or a close family member has in a private clinic, hospital, pharmacy or other institution to which you propose to refer them to for investigation or treatment.

Can doctors advertise in a newspaper or online?

There is no bar to doctors advertising their practice in a newspaper or online, subject to the restrictions detailed above.

“The contents of this publication are indicative of current developments and contain guidance on general medico legal queries. It does not constitute and should not be relied upon as definitive legal, clinical or other advice and if you have any specific queries, please contact Medisec for advice”.