

DRAFT: The regulation of doctors in Greece: a summary

Who does what?

QA of higher education	Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Registration and licensure	Registration: 60 regional medical associations Licensure: Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity's Department of Medical and Other Scientific Staff administered through 325 municipalities Assessment of overseas qualifications: the Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Centre
Standards	Set out in law, promulgated by national medical association and the regional medical associations
Non-adherence to standards	Process conducted initially within hospital; thereafter can escalate to regional medical association disciplinary board, then national medical association's Supreme Disciplinary Council

1. Introduction

In Greece, the healthcare system is centrally controlled by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity (MHSS). Policy-making, financing and staffing decisions are all made by the MHSS. Health professional regulation in Greece is based on national legislation, enacted by the Greek Parliament. While the MHSS bears overall responsibility for the national health system, the department that is directly responsible for the licensure of doctors is the Department of Medical and Other Scientific Staff; licensure is administered through the 325 municipalities. Other regulatory functions are undertaken by the national medical association, regional medical associations, and the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

The Department of Medical and other Scientific Staff

Apart from its responsibility over medical staff, the Department also:

- Ensures that national regulations are harmonised with European Union directives
- Recognises qualifications and skills obtained by doctors abroad
- Directly communicates with the Central Health Council (KeSY) which advises the Department on regulatory issues

2. Quality assurance of higher education

The Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQAA) is responsible for the quality assurance of medical courses. One of its objectives is to guarantee the transparency of assessment procedures and to support higher education institutions in carrying out the procedures aimed at ensuring and improving quality, informing the state and higher education institutions about international developments and trends, and promoting research in this field.

Quality assurance procedures for medical education are mostly left to individual university institutions, respecting their autonomy. The accreditation process comprises two stages. The first is self-evaluation by expert committees. Four aspects of each institution are evaluated: (i) teaching (ii) research (iii) curricula and (iv) other services.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

The basic requirement that doctors participate in a programme of CPD is part of the Code of Medical Ethics (2005), passed by the Greek Parliament. Doctors must attend a minimum of 80 hours of compulsory further training, in every five year period. However, specific rules are not defined, and in fact, participation in CPD is unmonitored and undertaken effectively on a voluntary basis. CPD activity may include conference, medical symposia, training seminars, and projects funded by the European Union related directly or indirectly with the further training of doctors. Because of the informal nature of the process, a high level of flexibility is provided by the existing legislation, allowing medical associations, as well as hospitals, regional health authorities and medical societies to organise their own training programmes for doctors.

3. Registration and licensure

In Greece, registration and licensure are different processes, managed separately. Issuing licences is the responsibility of the national MHSS. The process is administered by the public health departments within municipalities, which function under the authority of the MHSS. There are 325 municipalities: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_municipalities_of_Greece_\(2011\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_municipalities_of_Greece_(2011))

In order to obtain a *licence to practise*, doctors in Greece are required to submit an application to the municipality public health directorate in which they intend to practise. The documents the applicant must submit include, amongst others, a certified copy of the medical diploma, and an official declaration that the candidate has not been committed of any crime or act in connection with professional practice. The licence is granted by the Minister of Health within a month of the date of application.

Because the licence is formally granted at the national level, it is portable across municipalities and thus is only granted once. According to national law, every five years a doctor must revalidate their licence to practise with the MHSS. Although the legal framework exists for licences to be withdrawn if doctors do not comply, in practice this has never been applied and currently doctors are not revalidated after they acquire licensure.

Before or after obtaining a licence doctors are also obliged to *register* as a member of the medical association in the area in which they intend to practise. There are 60 local medical associations in

Greece. These are self-governing professional bodies. Doctors are not allowed to practise outside the area of the respective medical association with which they are registered. In cases where doctors move to a different area to practise, they are required to cancel their registration with the previous regional medical association and to re-register with the new local medical association.

Health professionals are obliged to renew their registration with the regional medical association on an annual basis.

Overseas professionals

As with other European countries, the procedures that govern whether a doctor from another country is able to practise in Greece differ in accordance with the country of origin. Graduates from non-European countries must submit a copy of their diploma for authentication by the Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (DOATAP), which is an organisation supervised by the Ministry of Education. It is responsible for the recognition of university or technological degrees that are awarded by foreign higher education institutions. For those already registered or who qualified in an EU country, the provision of the Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC apply.

Language requirements

Licensure and registration requirements in Greece do not specify any language proficiency standards. Practitioners from other countries are required to be proficient in Greek language only when applying for work in public organisations. The standards and levels of proficiency are set by the Greek Language Centre, while the Ministry of Education specifies the types of certificate issued, the conditions for their acquisition, the process and content of examinations, conditions of exam participation, and all other relevant details.

4. Standards of practice

The National Medical Association and the regional medical associations are responsible for setting out professional and ethical standards in the profession, in accordance with the Medical Code of Ethics specified in Greek law. A new code of ethics came into effect in 2005.

5. Non-adherence to standards

When members of the public wish to file a complaint against a doctor, the first stage is usually to raise the matter with an office that public hospitals are obliged to maintain, and whose function is to address citizens' rights, patient complaints and quality control. The matter is dealt with by the organisation in the first instance.

If it cannot be resolved, a regional disciplinary board can be convened under the auspices of the regional medical association. The board is authorised to judge cases of misconduct by association members, and impose a sanction. The board is required to issue a ruling no later than three months after referral. Doctors who disagree with the board's decision have the right to appeal to the Supreme Disciplinary Council of the National Medical Association.

Sanctions

Four types of sanction can be imposed by the regional and supreme disciplinary boards:

- Admonition
- A fine from 14-60 Euros
- Suspension of licence to practise from one month to three years
- Withdrawal of licence to practice

CHRE August 2012

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