CQC Rolls Out Emergency Support Framework for General Practice

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CQC recently launched its Emergency Support Framework (ESF) for health and social care providers during the pandemic. The framework is being rolled out sector by sector and came in to effect in general practice from 18 May 2020.

Whilst CQC has temporarily halted routine inspections during this emergency period, it has retained its regulatory role by implementing an Emergency Support Framework, designed to ensure risks can be identified and acted on. Dr Rosie Benneyworth, Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services, recently wrote, "*...as the regulator our core purpose remains the same, to ensure health and social care services provide people with safe, effective, compassionate, high quality care*".

The new ESF tool has been designed to enable a structured framework for conversations between providers and inspectors. The calls will be undertaken via Microsoft Teams and inspectors will contact providers to arrange a date and time to make the call.

CQC has published the questions, which will be asked during the call. CQC has stated that it may not be necessary to ask all of the questions, but we would advise that you prepare for all the questions, in the event you are asked to respond to each of them.

The questions are separated into four key areas:

- Safe care and treatment - the questions will cover aspects such as infection and prevention control, equipment and risk management.
- Staffing arrangements - the questions will deal with staffing and whether there were any shortfalls.
- Protection from abuse - the questions will cover issues such as whether people were protected from abuse, neglect and discrimination and whether the provider properly managed safeguarding incidents.
- Assurance processes, monitoring, and risk management - the questions will deal with matters such as whether the provider took action to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, whether care and

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treatment was sufficiently recorded and if the provider worked effectively with external professionals.

The guidance document can be read in full here and we strongly recommend that providers make themselves familiar with the four key areas and the question framework.

During the call, inspectors will make a note of the discussion around the four key areas, any particular challenges faced by the provider and any examples of good practice and innovative ways of responding to challenges. Following the call, the inspector will prepare a "Summary Record", which will detail:

- the questions asked and the appropriate standard wording that reflects the provider's answer;
- a summary of the specific internal and external risks and challenges identified;
- any sources of support suggested by CQC;
- a short summary of whether the service is 'managing' or 'needs support'.

CQC appears to have gone to great lengths to emphasise that the ESF is not an inspection. As such, there will be no rating and the factual accuracy process will not apply. CQC will not publish the record of the call on their website. Providers should be aware that any findings may be shared with other agencies.

CQC states that its main aim is to support providers at this exceptionally difficult time and any enforcement action is likely to be exceptional. However, providers should be alert to that fact that CQC continues to take an active role in the regulation of services. Whilst we hope that CQC will take a sensible approach to regulation during this pandemic, we are mindful that CQC has increased the level of enforcement action over recent years and has made it clear that it will take action if people are at risk during the pandemic. It is important that providers be prepared for the ESF calls with their inspector.

If you have any questions, or require support, please contact our experienced healthcare team on 01202 786171 or email online.enquiries@la-law.com.

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