

Temporary annotation of prescribing qualifications associated with emergency powers in relation to COVID-19

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, the health and social care sector must continue to work together to ensure that our workforce has everything they need in order to provide safe and effective care to people who use services. The trajectory and progress of the pandemic is being reassessed frequently with new data emerging every day. It is therefore right that we continue to regulate and support nurses, midwives and nursing associates (in England) based on the most up to date information we have at any given time.

In addition to the emergency power to grant temporary registration to suitable individuals or groups to support the Covid-19 emergency, we also have an emergency power to give either individual nurses and midwives, or groups of nurses and midwives, a temporary annotation which allows them to prescribe medicines. This temporary annotation can be used in relation to nurses or midwives with permanent or temporary registration who are considered by the NMC to be fit, proper and suitably experienced to prescribe in a specified capacity with regard to the Covid-19 emergency, despite not having an approved prescribing qualification.

Like our temporary registration power, this temporary prescribing annotation power can only be used by us during the Covid-19 emergency situation advised by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been in frequent communication with the four Chief Nursing Officers of the United Kingdom, the Council of Deans of Health, Unite, UNISON, the Royal College of Nursing, and the Royal College of Midwives. As such, the use of any of our emergency powers has been significantly guided by the collective input of these organisations and their knowledge of the needs of patients, people using services and the health and care workforce.

In relation to prescribing, although we have this emergency power to temporarily annotate some additional nurses and midwives as prescribers, we recognise that there are a number of risks in relation to this. In particular, we have concerns about how it could be implemented with sufficient safeguards, while still being operationally useful in the care of people using services. Therefore in order for us to decide to use this emergency power, we would need to be assured by those leading and supporting the provision of health and social care services across the UK that there was a specific need to temporarily increase the number of nurse or midwife prescribers and that the benefits of doing this would outweigh those risks.

The four Chief Nursing Officers have collectively considered the current situation across the UK and have assured us that the use of this power would not be beneficial at the present time. As a consequence, we have no current plans to give either individual nurses and midwives, or groups of nurses and midwives, a temporary annotation allowing them to prescribe medicines for the purpose of the Covid-19 emergency.

We will continue to work collaboratively with our partners as the pandemic continues to develop, and this decision will continue to be reviewed.