



Appearing as a witness at a GCC hearing: What you need to know

If you have raised a concern about a chiropractor, the independent Investigating or Health Committees may decide it needs to be considered further at a formal hearing. If this happens, you may be asked to attend the hearing as a witness. You will be asked questions about your concern and the evidence you provided.

We understand that attending a hearing can feel stressful. This guide will help you understand what to expect and how to prepare.

What happens at a formal hearing?

During a formal hearing, the Professional Conduct Committee will listen to all of the evidence – including yours – and decide whether the chiropractor is able to practice safely and effectively ('fit to practise').

Before giving your evidence, you will be asked to take an oath, or affirmation, in the same way you would if you gave evidence in a court of law. You will then be asked to explain what happened in your own words, and answer questions about your evidence.

Legal representatives for the GCC and the chiropractor will be at the hearing, and they will ask you questions. This is a normal part of the process.

Once you have given your evidence you can choose to stay on the video link and observe, unless the committee has decided that the hearing should be in private.



Where will the hearing take place?

Hearings are usually held virtually using video conference software. You will be sent details about how to join the hearing in advance. To join the call, it is important you have:

- A computer or tablet with a camera.
- A good internet connection.
- A quiet, private space where you won't be disturbed.

Who will be at the hearing?

When you join the virtual hearing there will be a few people on the video link.

- Three members of the independent Professional Conduct Committee (PCC). These are
 - the committee chair (who leads the hearing)
 - a chiropractor
 - a lay member (someone who isn't a chiropractor)
- Legal representatives for the General Chiropractic Council (GCC) and the chiropractor. Sometimes the chiropractor may choose to represent themselves.
- The chiropractor also has the right to join the hearing and we will let you know if they plan to attend. Special measures can be put in place if you are concerned about their attendance.
- An independent barrister may be present to give the committee legal advice.

Hearings are usually open to the public, so members of the public may join online. Sometimes a hearing is held in private if sensitive information is being discussed or if the case involves a child or vulnerable adult. We will inform you if this is the case.

What is my role as a witness?

As a witness, you will be asked to provide further information about the evidence you provided when raising your concern about a chiropractor. You will be asked questions by legal representatives for the GCC and the chiropractor.

When you are being questioned, please say if you:

- do not understand the question.
- do not remember something.
- do not know the answer.
- want a short break.

It is important that you answer all the questions put to you clearly and accurately and try to keep your answers short and to the point. Take your time when answering questions – it's okay to pause and think.

We understand that being a witness can be stressful, but the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee and the GCC's barrister or solicitor will make sure that you are treated fairly and with respect during the hearing. The Chair of the Committee will also make sure that you are not put under any unnecessary pressure.

What can I do to prepare?

We can arrange additional dedicated support for you at any stage of the process.

Before the hearing:

- ✔ Read through your witness statement to refresh your memory.
- ✔ Think about what happened and the timeline of events.
- ✔ Consider possible questions you could be asked and how you would answer them.
- ✔ Test your video and audio.
- ✔ Plan what you will wear. This is a formal hearing and the other people attending the hearing will be dressed smartly.

On the day:

- ✔ Join the virtual hearing from a quiet space free from distractions and away from other people.
- ✔ Have a glass of water nearby.
- ✔ Have a copy of your witness statement next to you, if you prepared one.
- ✔ Have a family member or friend available to talk to after the hearing.

What happens after the hearing?

After hearing all the evidence, members of the committee will determine whether the chiropractor is a significant risk to patients and the public. If the committee decides a chiropractor is not 'fit to practise' a sanction will be imposed. The purpose of a sanction is not to punish the chiropractor but to protect the public. The sanction could include

- a warning
- set conditions that limit how the chiropractor can practise
- suspension or removal from the register

We will contact you after the hearing to let you know the committee's decision.

Independent support service

We recognise that going through the Fitness to Practise process can feel stressful.

All witnesses have access to an independent and confidential support service, available from the early enquiry stage through to three months after the hearing.

A trained case worker will work with you to create a tailored support plan, talk you through each stage of the process, and provide a safe, protected space to discuss any concerns. They will not share any information with the GCC.

To use this service, you can ask your GCC point of contact to refer you, and the support service will get in touch directly. Alternatively, you can contact them yourself:

Phone: 0300 303 5394 (calls charged at local rates)

Email: RegulatorSupportService@victimsupport.org.uk

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