

in Whitehead

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT
NEWCASTLE REGIONAL HOSPITAL BOARD

MODES OF ADDRESS OF MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

This memorandum is intended as a guide for the staff of the Board to a subject which is full of pitfalls. By referring to it it is hoped that they will be able to conform to accepted usage.

Present usage is unnecessarily elaborate. Radical reform would be welcome and would relieve us all of trouble. To describe the system does not imply that it is approved. All this notwithstanding it is elementary good manners to make an effort to use correct forms of address.

Registration

The term 'medical practitioner' means a person registered as such by the General Medical Council or its branch councils for Scotland or Ireland.

Registration may be full, provisional, or temporary. A person becomes eligible for provisional registration when he obtains a registrable qualification from a university or a recognised examining body, either in Great Britain or Ireland or in some other country which has reciprocal arrangements with Great Britain for mutual recognition of medical qualifications. Provisional registration conveys the same privileges to the person registered as full registration but only for the purpose of service in resident posts in hospitals which are approved for the purpose of house officer (pre-registration) service. Many hospitals in the United Kingdom are not approved for this purpose. After six months satisfactory service in each of two posts as house physician or house surgeon, a provisionally registered practitioner becomes eligible for full registration. A medical practitioner with a registrable foreign or Commonwealth qualification may be eligible for full registration if he has completed 12 months satisfactory service as a resident house officer in an Approved Hospital or has had other professional experience which the General Medical Council is prepared to accept as substantially equivalent.

Temporary registration is granted to foreign or Commonwealth practitioners for a period and enables them to practise for the period in the hospital shown on their certificate of temporary registration. The names of temporarily registered practitioners do not appear in the Medical Register.

The Medical Register is not a guide to all the diplomas, degrees, and decorations held by practitioners. Only the degrees and diplomas which he is entitled to register are shown (and not all of these, if he does not care to register them). The exception is the D.P.H. (Diploma of Public Health) and its equivalents, which are required by statute for certain public appointments. Diplomas such as the D.P.M. and D.O.M.S., and even the F.R.C.O.G., are not shown in the Medical Register.

The Prefixes 'Dr.' and 'Mr.'

The normal form of address is 'Dr.' but a surgeon is referred to as 'Mr.'. Obstetricians and gynaecologists are usually referred to as 'Mr.' in the same way as surgeons. To give examples:

A letter to a physician should be addressed:

Dr. A. B. Church; or A. B. Church, Esq., M.D., M.R.C.P.
and should begin 'Dear Dr. Church'.

A letter to a surgeon should be addressed:

D. E. Frank, Esq., M.S., F.R.C.S.
and should begin 'Dear Mr. Frank'.

This distinction is one of function, not of qualification. A physician may not hold a doctorate of medicine from a University, but he is still referred to as 'Dr.'. A surgeon may hold a doctor's degree, but he remains 'Mr.'

Other Prefixes

A professor is usually referred to as such, unless he has expressed a wish to be referred to as 'Dr.' or 'Mr.'. It sometimes happens that professors wish to be so called only in academic circles. The word 'professor' should be given in full, and a letter to one should be addressed thus:

Professor G. H. Insight, M.D., F.R.C.P., D.P.M.
and should begin
Dear Professor Insight.

It is permissible to abbreviate 'Professor' to 'Prof.' only when giving a list of names, thus:

Dr. Church
Mr. Frank
Prof. Insight.

Titles of knighthood or nobility such as 'Sir', 'Lord', 'Dame', or 'Lady' supersede 'Dr.', 'Mr.' and sometimes 'Professor'. Their use is subject to special rules which are not dealt with here as they are of general application.

Initials and Christian Names

Initials of medical practitioners should never be left out on envelopes or in analogous situations. However, women medical practitioners are addressed by their forename; for example, letters to them should be addressed :

Dr. Joan Knox, M.R.C.P.

or Miss Lillian Masterson, M.D., F.R.C.O.G.

and should begin

Dear Dr. Knox

or Dear Miss Masterson.

The use of initials and forenames after titles of knighthood and nobility is subject to special rules, to which reference should be sought in the appropriate literature.

Letters after names

By custom, these are placed in the following order:

1. Orders and decorations;
2. University degrees, as follows:
 - (i) M.A.
 - (ii) Doctorates
 - (iii) Masterships
 - (iv) Bachelor's degrees;
3. Diplomas - as follows:
 - (a) Medical Diplomas:
 - (i) Fellowships and Memberships (except M.R.C.S.) in: medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, other specialties
 - (ii) Qualifying diplomas
 - (iii) Other diplomas;
 - (b) Non-medical diplomas:

(F.R.S. follows all others);
4. Letters indicating offices or appointments (such as J.P., M.P.);
5. Letters indicating membership of H.M. Forces.

Some medical practitioners collect an enormous number of letters after their names. It is not always necessary to give them all. Frequently a doctor will quote on his own writing paper only the most important of his degrees and diplomas and this can be taken as a guide. However, orders and decorations should always be given in full.

Membership of a Royal College supersedes a licentiate or a diploma and Fellowship supersedes Membership. Thus a man who qualifies L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. and later passes the examination for Membership of the Royal College of Physicians is then referred to as Dr. N. O. Perkins, M.R.C.P., not Dr. N. O. Perkins, M.R.C.P., L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S.

As an appendix to this note there is a list of examples which sets out in order recommended the principal letters in common use. The list is not exhaustive. It is followed by an index with the groups of letters arranged alphabetically.

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