



The role of the Medico-Legal Adviser

The role of a medico-legal adviser is a challenging one that combines experience of medicine with the application of legal principles.

Medico-legal advisers usually work for medical defence organisations and can be involved in a number of different functions including:

- Coordinating the defence of doctors facing a wide range of medico-legal difficulties including registration body investigations, Coroners Inquests/Fatal Accident Inquiries, disciplinary processes, criminal investigations
- Defending clinical negligence claims
- Providing advice to doctors on the phone, in writing or in person in relation to medico-legal and ethical issues arising from their practice
- Advocacy - both written and oral, including supporting and representing members in a variety of fora including local hearings (involving issues such as clinical errors or performance concerns)
- Advising on clinical risk management
- Writing articles or other material on subjects related to medical law and ethics
- Involvement in educational and training activities

Advisers must be able to quickly assimilate large volumes of complex clinical information and assess vulnerabilities in relation to the defence of a matter. They need to be able to provide detailed instructions to solicitors and independent experts, and to contribute to conferences with barristers and the rest of the defence team.

Medico-legal advisers may then also be present at the subsequent trial or hearing to support and advise the doctor.

Good communication skills are essential for this purpose so that the legal team is properly directed and the member adequately supported.

Medico-legal advisers come from a wide range of clinical backgrounds and are likely to have had at least five years of post-registration experience in addition to holding a relevant qualification in medical law. The MFFLM is considered appropriate by all three defence organisations in this respect.

Dealing with a large number of claims every year requires stamina, self-confidence, an eye for detail, strong analytical and communication skills, and good time-management.

The career is interesting and varied, with plenty of scope for exercising one's initiative. A medico-legal adviser must have the confidence and knowledge to work in the multiple arenas where a doctor's professional reputation is at risk: whether a clinical negligence claim for damages or in any of the increasing number of tribunals, ethical, or disciplinary matters. There is little doubt that doctors are members of one of the most accountable professions where although the MLA role is demanding and intellectually stimulating, the input provided is greatly appreciated by colleagues who have to request support.

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