

# FACULTY OF FORENSIC & LEGAL MEDICINE

of the Royal College of Physicians of London



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Registered Charity No 1119599

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## **The Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine Position Statement The examination of children who disclose or may be at risk of abuse and the provision of evidence arising from such examinations.**

The Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine (FFLM) is aware of recent concerns regarding the role and supervision of physician associates (PAs). The FFLM has learnt that PAs have been employed within specialist services which are commissioned to provide the assessment, care and management of children, where there are concerns about child abuse, including child sexual abuse. The FFLM understands there is information about this, in the public domain, due to the recent publication of a response to a Freedom of Information, (FOI) request.

In addition to the health, wellbeing and care of the child, there are additional implications for such specialist services, that is, safeguarding and the interaction with and requirements of the judicial system. This interaction may be in the criminal, civil, and, in particular, the family courts, as well as the Coroner's Court at an Inquest, or, in Scotland, the Procurator Fiscal, in a Fatal Accident Inquiry, (FAI).

The FFLM takes care to avoid any specific comment about a service or locality, due to the risk of inadvertently identifying a child or family, a service or its staff; as well as the potential risk of interfering with any judicial process, which has not yet reached its conclusion.

Any clinician undertaking an assessment, treatment or procedure must:

- have the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- work within their scope of practice and level of competency or capability, (as the two are not synonymous);
- be properly supervised, whether directly or indirectly

In relation to children, in 2020, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) published the Child protection service delivery standards<sup>1</sup> which lists 13 standards, summarised on page 10. Whilst all are important, the FFLM highlights standards 4, 5 and 8:

- *Child protection medical assessments are carried out by paediatric clinicians working at ST4 level or equivalent and above with relevant Level 3 child protection competencies.*
- *Child protection medical assessments are carried out by clinicians with appropriate supervision.*
- *The assessment, professional opinion and outcome resulting from a child protection medical assessment is clearly recorded and is communicated to the requesting professional as well as to the family and child as appropriate.*

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<sup>1</sup> RCPCH [Child protection service delivery standards - RCPCH Child Protection Portal](#)

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Each standard is covered in more detail with:

- The indicators of good practice to achieve it;
- The rationale and guidance for it;
- Suggested metrics to assess it.

The doctor described by the RCPCH, in the service delivery standard, is a regulated health care professional, who has, at 'ST4', undertaken the following education and supervised training:

- At least four, or more usually five years at a University medical school;
- Two Foundation Years, after graduation;
- Enrolment, following a competitive application and recruitment process, into a paediatric specialty training programme, for a minimum of three years.

The FFLM has published a number of Quality Standards, (QS), covering clinical forensic practice, including, with the RCPCH, Quality Standards in Paediatric Sexual Offence Medicine, (PSOM).<sup>2</sup> In this document, the regulated clinicians described and the requirements of them, including qualifications, are doctors, nurses and midwives.

In August 2023, NHS England published the Paediatric forensic healthcare practitioner capabilities framework for child sexual abuse assessment.<sup>3</sup> Both publications include the RCPCH standards described above, regarding the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience of clinicians undertaking such work.

A number of sources outline the role of PAs, including from the Faculty of Physician Associates of the Royal College of Physicians, which states: '*Physician associates are healthcare professionals who work as part of a multidisciplinary team with supervision from a named senior doctor (a General Medical Council registered consultant or general practitioner), providing care to patients in primary, secondary and community care environments.*'<sup>4</sup>

Taking account of all the above, the FFLM can confirm that:

- The FFLM has no members who are PAs, nor has it received any applications from PAs, for membership;
- The clinical knowledge and skills required for the assessment and examination of children in these circumstances, are such that they are far beyond the level at which a PA should be working, even under supervision.

The FFLM's view is a PA should not be undertaking the examination of children who have disclosed abuse, or when there are concerns children are at risk of abuse and, it follows, they should not be providing evidence on such matters to the Courts.

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<sup>2</sup> FFLM [FFLM Quality Standards for Clinicians Undertaking Paediatric Sexual Offence Medicine \(PSOM\) - FFLM](#)

<sup>3</sup> NHS England [NHS England » Paediatric forensic healthcare practitioner capabilities framework for child sexual abuse assessment](#)

<sup>4</sup> Faculty of Physician Associates [Faculty of Physician Associates - quality health care across the NHS \(fparcp.co.uk\)](#)

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