



## Preliminary Competence Inquiry (PCI)

### **Purpose of the PCI**

The PCI is a process which utilises broad-based inquiry. Unlike a performance assessment it does not attempt to assess competence concerns about a doctor.

The PCI is the first step to provide us with more information in order to make a decision as to whether a doctor needs to undergo a performance assessment by seeking to explore the doctor's:

- education or professional development activities
- professional support and associations
- distracters or stressors on the doctor's practice
- working environment and practice systems
- general strengths and weaknesses.

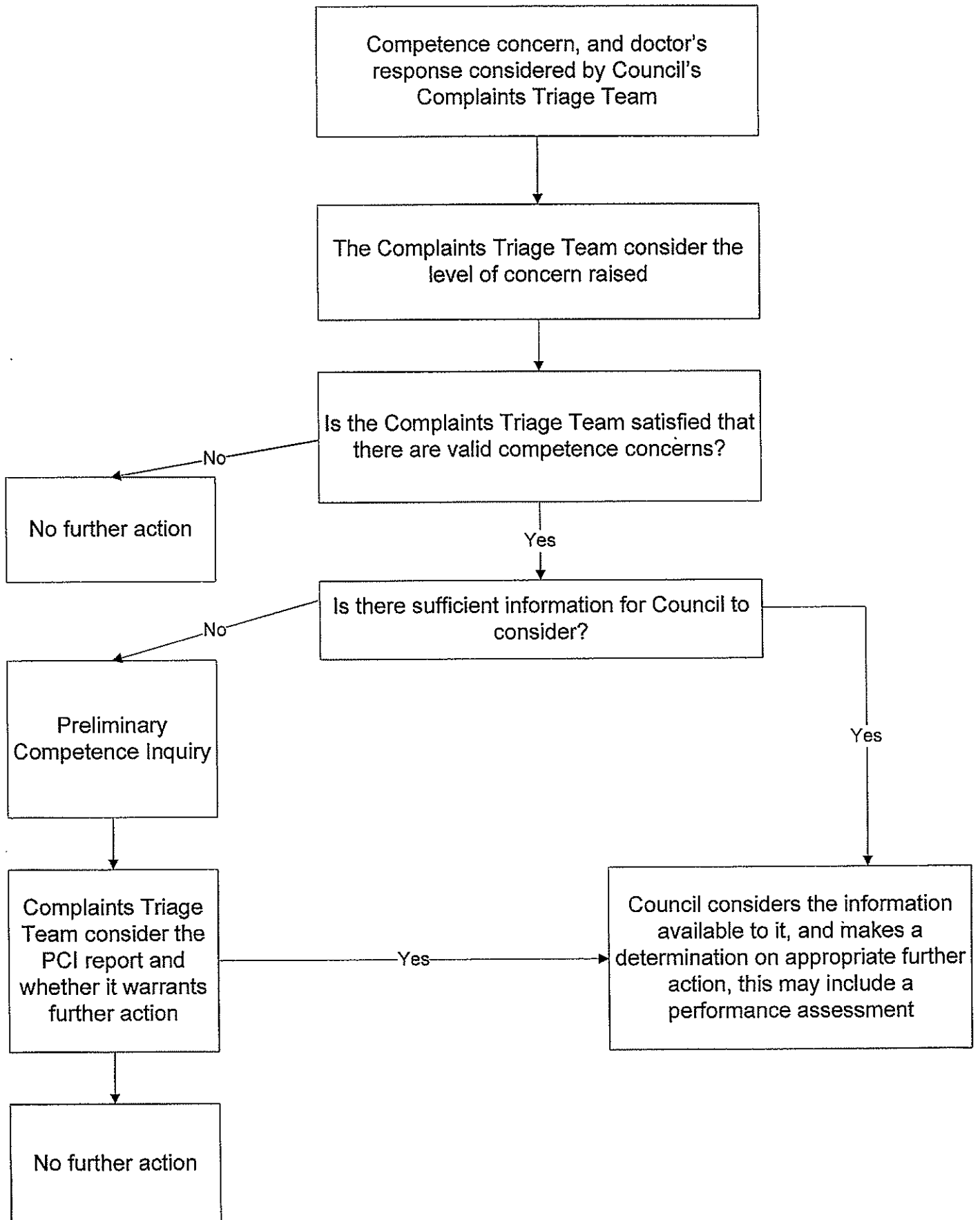
We cannot require a doctor to undergo a PCI. However if they decline, it is more likely that Council will order a full performance assessment in order to obtain information about that doctor's practice.

### **How will a PCI work?**

The process begins with a group of Council's senior staff, including Council's Chairperson, Chief Executive, Registrar, Medical Advisors, Senior Policy Analyst, and Professional Standards Manager ("the complaints triage team") referring concerns about a doctor to an independent Council interviewer. The interviewer, who will be a medical practitioner, will be asked to look into the concerns and provide a report to Council on their findings.

The interviewer will visit and interview the doctor using the same interview tool that is used in performance assessments. Before interviewing the doctor, the interviewer will be provided with the initial concerns and the doctor's response which provides useful background information. After the interview with the doctor, the interviewer will write a report outlining his/her findings, but not make any conclusions on whether the doctor meets the required standard of competence.

This diagram outlines how the PCI works:



**Will a doctor be able to review the report's findings?**

Yes. The doctor undergoing the PCI process will have an opportunity to review and comment on the report written by the interviewer, before it is considered by Council.

The doctor does not have a statutory right to appear before Council at this point, but Council members will see and read any comments the doctor may have made about the interviewer's report in considering any referral to a performance assessment.

**Who will interview doctors?**

The interviewer carrying out the PCI will be a medical practitioner from the Council's Performance Assessment Committee (PAC) member pool. The interviewer will have previous experience in and understand the process of conducting performance assessments.

**How do Council staff decide which doctors are referred for a PCI?**

The threshold for the complaints triage team to refer a concern for a PCI is when the concern raised about the doctor suggests possible competence concerns, but the complaints triage team believe there is insufficient information on which Council can base a decision.

**How did Council decide the PCI format?**

The PCI format was deliberately chosen by Council because:

- the interview has a structure to it but it is not too prescriptive and can clearly be differentiated from a review or assessment
- the interview will not investigate the initial concern but will look at the doctor's practising environment
- PAC assessors have consistently said that in conducting a performance assessment, the initial interview with a doctor being assessed gives them a good indication about the doctors practise.

The PCI report will only identify a doctor's areas of strength and weakness, and will not include any recommendations. If the complaints triage team consider that after the PCI there are some concerning aspects about the doctor's practise, the PCI report will go to a Council meeting together with any written response from the doctor. Council will then make a decision on whether or not the doctor requires a performance assessment.

**Won't a PCI bias a PAC review?**

The sole objective of the PCI is to gather information and feed into the complaints triage team's decision making process as to the best course of action to take. The report will be used for this purpose only.

If a doctor is subsequently ordered by Council to undergo a performance assessment, the PCI report will not be provided to the PAC and no reference or information will be made or given by Council staff to the PAC as to whether a PCI has been undertaken. Only the original background information will be provided to the PAC.

**Are any other registration authorities undertaking PCIs?**

Yes. Currently several other regulatory authorities in New Zealand, such as the Dental Council and the Physiotherapists Board, are using a formalised inquiry process using an independent interviewer.

### **What are the benefits of a PCI?**

Information collected during a PCI may mean that a performance assessment is not ordered by Council.

For the doctor the benefits of a PCI are:

- a one on one meeting with an interviewer as opposed to meeting with a three member PAC panel
- a reduction in both personal and workplace stress
- the opportunity to establish a rapport with the interviewer.

For the Council the benefits are:

- a cost and time savings for staff and PAC interviewer
- better outcomes and support for the doctor
- a more informal process that meets the legal needs of the HPCAA that requires the Council to look into concerns raised about doctors

### **PCI Pilot**

The Medical Council is undertaking the PCI as a pilot for a 12-month trial period beginning 1 February 2011.

### **How will the PCI be evaluated?**

At the end of the pilot, the complaints triage team and Council members will be asked to evaluate the PCI based on their experience and on the data collected from the interviewers and doctors during the pilot.

The main questions that the pilot will be seeking to answer are:

- is this a worthwhile step in the performance process?
- does the information gained through the PCI better enable Council to decide whether a doctor should undergo a performance assessment?

If you have a question we haven't answered above, please contact Sidonie on 0800 286 801 extn 867 or email [sidonie@mcnz.org.nz](mailto:sidonie@mcnz.org.nz)