

Licence revoked here, MD finally faces same fate in UK

A gynecologist who was allowed to practise in Britain after losing his licence in Canada was finally struck off the British register July 24. The General Medical Council, which regulates medicine here, admitted it was told of Richard Neale's Canadian record but took no action.

In 1998, the GMC even appointed him to assess the competence of other doctors suspected of malpractice. By then Neale was under investigation himself. When confronted at the time he said: "I think I would be able to offer some insight to other doctors who are in trouble. A wounded person is often the best healer."

Neale, 54, was trained in the UK. In the 1980s he had his operating privileges revoked in British Columbia and was ordered to undergo retraining. Instead, he moved to Ontario; he was struck off the register there in 1985 following the 1981 death of a patient who suffered an amniotic embolism and ruptured uterus after he administered oxytocin followed by prostaglandin.

While undergoing investigation in Ontario, he returned to the UK and became a consultant at the Friarage Hospital in Yorkshire. When tipped off by

the Canadian authorities, both the GMC and the Yorkshire Health Authority decided to take no action. Neale eventually left Yorkshire and worked in several other areas, where he also undertook expert witness work for plaintiffs; those reports are now worthless.

The GMC found him guilty of 32 charges involving 12 patients. The charges included incompetence, operating without consent, carrying out unnecessary procedures, failing to monitor patients postoperatively and duping a patient into paying for private surgery.

Before his sentence was passed, Neale addressed the panel for 55 minutes. He broke down in tears as he pleaded to be allowed to remain on the register. He spoke of his Christian faith, his wife and 2 young children, and his "remarkable success rate." He blamed his downfall on 2 former patients who founded a support group. More than 150 women in Britain are complaining about their treatment from him, and many are suing him.

The GMC receives an average of 2742 complaints a year from patients, and revokes the licences of an average of 21 doctors a year. Most of those



Dr. Richard Neale: pleas fall on deaf ears

struck from the register apply for reinstatement, but only 1 in 4 succeeds. It is currently in the midst of a nasty spat with the British Medical Association, whose members recently voted "no confidence" in the regulatory body (see *CMAJ* 2000;163[4]:432). — *Caroline Richmond*, London, England

Staffing woes plague cancer treatment in Manitoba

Manitoba cancer patients are heading to the US for treatment because of a shortage of radiation therapists. The therapists, who had been without a contract since October 1999, finally signed a new 4-year deal in late July.

Ken Swan, labour relations officer with the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals, which represents more than 40 radiation therapists, says there are about 12 vacancies for radiation therapists in Manitoba but they are unlikely to be filled because of the greener pastures outside the province. "Young, mobile therapists are leaving to seek higher wages," he says. (The therapists provide the radiation prescribed by physicians.)

Dr. Brent Schacter, a medical oncologist and president and CEO of CancerCare Manitoba, says the 50 to 60 Manitoba patients who have been sent to the Altru Hospital in Grand Forks, North Dakota, represent only a small percentage of the 2800 patients treated with radiation in Man-

itoba each year at CancerCare. Schacter said the Manitoba government created a fund last fall to send patients to Grand Forks because of the shortage of radiation therapists and a long waiting list.

That waiting list may get even longer if x-ray technicians who supply some services to CancerCare walk off the job. They recently picketed in front of Winnipeg's largest tertiary hospital, the Health Sciences Centre, demanding parity with x-ray technicians in other provinces. "I could earn \$3 per hour more if I moved to Saskatoon," said Al Saydak. He said the HSC's 65 x-ray technicians have been without a contract for 14 months and are the lowest paid in Manitoba and Canada.

Health Minister Dave Chomiak said he will not get into a bidding war for health care professionals, even though other provinces pay much higher wages and offer signing bonuses. — *David Square*, Winnipeg