

6minutes News

'Crammer college' doctor struck off for sharing confidential exam questions: UK

The doctor 'procured and shared' confidential exam questions while tutoring IMGs, tribunal hears



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A doctor in the UK has been struck off after a tribunal found he had shared confidential exam material with IMGs preparing to sit a clinical exam.

Dr Nikhilesh Vardhini worked as a tutor at Aspire college, a so-called 'crammer' institution for IMGs, which offered courses on passing the two-part Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) exam.

The exam included an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) featuring 18 clinical stations that presented medical scenarios using either an actor or manikin.

Dr Vardhini himself sat the exam three times, according to the finding by the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service.

Each time he had taken the exam, he had signed a confidentiality agreement not to share details of the OSCE scenarios.

However, in October 2019, a 'crammer' folder from Aspire was found at the General Medical Council (GMC) assessment centre, following an OSCE test day, the tribunal wrote.

The material closely resembled scenarios from the GMC's bank of exam cases, including many "exact matches" of the names, ages and test results of fictional patients.

The documents were traced back to Dr Vardhini, who initially denied being the author of the materials.

However, the tribunal found his evidence to be unreliable.

The GMC said the material was likely to have been elicited from candidates who had just taken the exam, rather than hacking, covert recording or leaking from within the GMC.

The tribunal found Dr Vardhini guilty of serious misconduct, saying he showed little insight or remorse for his actions.

“It was more likely than not that Dr Vardhini, and/or a third party acting on his general instruction, had procured information about the content of [the exam] which was confidential and not made publicly available by the GMC,” the tribunal wrote.

“He showed a reckless disregard for public safety by enabling some IMGs to gain an unfair advantage.

“His dishonest actions also persisted over a long time.”

Belatedly, Dr Vardhini acknowledged that he was also married to the director of Aspire college, as well as being a tutor there.

“This connection to the sole director of Aspire, with whom he lived, suggests that he may have obtained a material advantage from the financial success of Aspire,” the tribunal wrote.

Dr Vardhini’s counsel argued he should be suspended rather than struck off to avoid losing a specialist in an area in which there was a shortage.

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He was working as a medical registrar for a locum agency, and as a respiratory registrar.

However, the tribunal considered his misconduct to be so serious as to be “fundamentally incompatible with continued registration”.