

ON PAPERS

Professional Conduct Committee Review Hearing

8 May 2025

Name: PARTRIDGE, Melanie
Registration number: 200278
Case number: CAS-196855-W5Y5V9

General Dental Council: Holly Watt, IHLPS

Registrant: Unrepresented

Fitness to practise: Impaired by reason of misconduct

Outcome: Suspended indefinitely

Committee members: Andrea Hammond (Chair, DCP Member)
Kamaljit Sandhu (Lay Member)
Sukhninder Sandhar (Dentist Member)

Legal Adviser: Andrew Granville-Stafford

Committee Secretary: Lola Bird

At this hearing the Committee made a determination that includes some private information. That information has been omitted from this public version of the determination, and this public document has been marked to show where private material has been removed.

1. This is a resumed hearing of Miss Partridge's case before the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC), pursuant to section 36Q of the *Dentists Act 1984 (as amended)* ('the Act'). The hearing is being conducted remotely by Microsoft Teams video-link.
2. The purpose of the hearing has been for the PCC to conduct a review of the substantive order of suspension currently in place on Miss Partridge's registration.
3. Neither party is present today, following a request made by the General Dental Council (GDC) for the review to take place on the papers. The Committee received from the GDC an indexed review hearing bundle (55 pages) as well as the Council's written submissions (14 pages).
4. The Committee first considered the issues of service and proceeding with the hearing in the absence of Miss Partridge and any representatives for either party. The Committee heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser in respect of both matters.

Decision on service

5. The Committee considered whether notice had been served on Miss Partridge in accordance with Rules 28 and 65 of the *GDC (Fitness to Practise) Rules Order of Council 2006* ('the Rules') and section 50A of the Act.
6. The Committee had regard to the indexed review hearing bundle, which included a copy of the Notice of Hearing dated 5 March 2025 ('the notice'). The notice was sent to Miss Partridge's registered address by Special Delivery and First Class post. A copy was also sent to her by email on 5 March 2025.
7. The Committee noted from the Royal Mail 'Track and Trace' information provided, that delivery of the copy of the notice sent by Special Delivery was attempted on 6 and 7 March 2025, with no answer at the address. The Committee took into account that there is no requirement within the Rules for the GDC to prove delivery of the notice, only that it was sent. It was satisfied from the evidence before it that the Council had met the requirement of sending notice to Miss Partridge.
8. The Committee was further satisfied that the notice sent to Miss Partridge complied with the 28-day notice period mandated by the Rules. The notice contained all the required particulars, including the date and time of the hearing, confirmation that it would be held remotely by Microsoft Teams, and that the Committee had the power to proceed with the hearing in Miss Partridge's absence.
9. On the basis of all the information provided, the Committee was satisfied that notice of the hearing had been served on Miss Partridge in accordance with the Rules and the Act.

Decision on whether to proceed in the absence of the registrant and on the papers

10. The Committee next considered whether to exercise its discretion under Rule 54 to proceed with the hearing in the absence of Miss Partridge and any representative for either party. It approached this issue with the utmost care and caution. The Committee took into account the factors to be considered in reaching its decision, as set out in the case of *R v Jones* [2002] UKHL 5, and as affirmed in the joined regulatory cases of *GMC v Adeogba*; *GMC v Visvardis* [2016] EWCA Civ 162.

11. The Committee remained mindful that fairness to Miss Partridge was an important consideration, but it also bore in mind the need to be fair to the GDC, and the public interest in the expeditious review of the current suspension order. The Committee noted the written submission made by the GDC inviting it to exercise its discretion to proceed with the matter in the absence of Miss Partridge and on the papers.

12. The Committee was satisfied that all reasonable efforts had been made by the GDC to notify Miss Partridge of this hearing. It noted that in addition to the notice of 5 March 2025, which was sent to her by post and by email, the Council sent a follow-up email, dated 14 March 2025, to enquire whether Miss Partridge had any objection to today's hearing taking place on the papers. Miss Partridge did not respond to that email. An attempt was also made by the GDC's solicitor to contact Miss Partridge by telephone on 16 April 2025. The Attendance Note in respect of that telephone call states that, "*The call did not connect and I was unable to leave a voicemail*". The GDC's solicitor also sent an email to Miss Partridge on that same day, 16 April 2025, with no response received.

13. The Committee took into account Miss Partridge's history of non-engagement with these fitness to practise proceedings. She did not attend the initial PCC hearing of her case, which was held in May 2022. In an email to the GDC prior to that initial hearing, dated 8 April 2022, Miss Partridge stated that "*I have already stated multiple times, I do not wish to take part in any future, meetings, hearings etc...*". Miss Partridge did not attend any of the subsequent PCC resumed hearings of her case.

14. The Committee was satisfied that Miss Partridge is aware of these proceedings, which have been ongoing for a number of years. She has not acknowledged any of the communications sent to her by the GDC in respect of today's hearing, and the Committee received no information to suggest that adjourning on this occasion would secure her attendance on a future date. It considered that Miss Partridge has disengaged from the process. In all the circumstances, the Committee concluded that an adjournment would serve no meaningful purpose.

15. In reaching its conclusion, the Committee took into account its statutory duty to review the current suspension order on Miss Partridge's registration, which is due for review no later than 12 June 2025. It considered that without good reason for deferring today's hearing, the review of the existing order should be undertaken as scheduled. The Committee was satisfied that it was fair and in the public interest to proceed on the papers in the absence of both parties.

Summary of the case background

16. Miss Partridge's case was first considered by the PCC at a hearing which took place in May 2022. She did not attend that hearing, and she was not represented in her absence. The allegations

considered by that initial PCC related to Miss Partridge's conduct in March 2020, whilst she was employed at a dental practice ('the Practice'), as well as her subsequent behaviour towards to the GDC and her lack of cooperation during its investigation into the matter.

17. By way of background, on 1 April 2020 the GDC received a complaint from Miss Partridge's then employer. The complaint outlined that on 19 March 2020, Miss Partridge had uploaded two inappropriate videos, apparently taken from the premises of the Practice, onto social media applications. It was noted that the Practice was located within a healthcare centre with a glass infrastructure and included several other healthcare settings, including a General Practitioner (GP) surgery. Miss Partridge was dismissed from her employment at the Practice following a disciplinary hearing into the incident.

18. The PCC in May 2022 found proved that Miss Partridge had failed to protect the confidentiality of a GP (Dr 1) and a patient (Patient 1) by posting the respective videos on social media without their consent. It was noted that the videos were recorded during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, when there was a national anxiety due to the unpredictability of the situation. The initial PCC also found proved that Miss Partridge had dishonestly provided false information to her then employer, by informing them that the videos were only shared on a private social media group confined to employees and/or former employees of the Practice, when, in fact, one or both of the videos had been shared on a wider basis.

19. In relation to Miss Partridge's conduct towards the GDC, the initial PCC found proved that on 3 March 2021, she failed to maintain appropriate standards of behaviour when she sent emails addressed to the Council stating, "Hello f*** you all goodbye" and "Go f*** yourself". The emails were sent by Miss Partridge in response to an email from the GDC on 3 March 2021, replying to her earlier query regarding Voluntary Removal from the GDC's Register.

20. There was also a finding at the initial PCC hearing that, from 13 May 2020 to 26 October 2021, Miss Partridge failed to cooperate with the GDC's investigation by not providing any, or any sufficient, proof of indemnity and details of her employment. In addition, it was found proved that over the same period, Miss Partridge further failed to cooperate with the GDC's investigation [PRIVATE].

21. The initial PCC determined that the facts found proved against Miss Partridge amounted to misconduct, in that her conduct "*fell seriously short of the standards expected of a registered dental care professional*". The initial PCC also determined that Miss Partridge's fitness to practise was impaired by reason of her misconduct on both public protection and wider public interest grounds. In its decision on impairment, it stated that:

"The Committee is of the view that Dr 1 and Patient 1 were both put at risk of harm by Ms Partridge posting videos to social media applications implying that they had been involved in coronavirus testing. [PRIVATE]. There is no doubt that Ms Partridge's numerous breaches of the fundamental tenets of the dental profession, as well as her dishonesty, have brought the profession into disrepute.

Due to the nature of the misconduct, the Committee was satisfied that it would be possible for Ms Partridge to remediate her failings. It noted that dishonesty is often said to be harder

to remediate, but in this case, where the dishonesty was confined to one incident and was at the lower end of the scale of dishonesty, the Committee concluded that it could be remedied.

However, the Committee concluded that based on Ms Partridge's very limited insight into her behaviour and her limited engagement with the investigation, there is a risk of repetition. There is no information before the Committee to indicate that Ms Partridge has attempted to remediate her failings. There have been numerous attempts made by the GDC to encourage Ms Partridge to engage with the regulatory process and to provide information necessary to the investigation, but she has failed to do so. Currently, there is very little information upon which to gauge whether the risk identified has been reduced".

22. The initial PCC determined to suspend Miss Partridge's registration for a period of six months and imposed an immediate order of suspension. That Committee also directed a review of the substantive suspension order shortly before its expiry. In directing the review, the initial PCC stated that:

"The reviewing Committee would be assisted by:

- Ms Partridge's meaningful engagement with the GDC and the regulatory process;*
- A reflective statement demonstrating her insight into, and understanding of, her failings."*

First resumed hearing – November 2022

23. A resumed hearing of Miss Partridge's case was convened on 23 November 2022, when a PCC conducted a review of the suspension order that was imposed on her registration in May 2022. The hearing was conducted on the papers in the absence of both parties.

24. The PCC in November 2022 determined that Miss Partridge's fitness to practise remained impaired by reason of her misconduct. It noted that:

"...Ms Partridge has not engaged with the GDC since 8 April 2022. The Committee has not seen any evidence of Ms Partridge's insight or learning in relation to the failings identified at the initial hearing in May 2022, despite being given the opportunity to do so. The absence of evidence to show that Ms Partridge has sufficient insight means that the Committee cannot say that such conduct is highly unlikely to be repeated. The Committee concluded therefore that there had been no material change in the circumstances of this case. In the absence of any evidence to show that the widespread and serious concerns identified by the PCC at the hearing in May 2022 have been addressed, the Committee considers that Ms Partridge's fitness to practise remains impaired".

25. The PCC in November 2022 determined to extend the suspension order by a period of six months, and it directed a further review shortly before the expiry of the order. The PCC in November 2022 reiterated the recommendations made by the initial PCC in relation to the evidence that would assist the next reviewing Committee.

Second resumed hearing – May 2023

26. A second resumed hearing of Miss Partridge's case was convened on 26 May 2023 when a further review of the suspension order was conducted. The hearing was conducted on the papers in the absence of both parties.

27. The PCC in May 2023 stated in its decision on impairment that:

"Since the order was last reviewed, Ms Partridge has failed to meaningfully engage with the GDC and has not demonstrated any remediation of her previous misconduct. Therefore, the Committee determined that there continued to be a risk of repetition and an ongoing risk to the public should Ms Partridge be permitted to practise without restriction. Although the Committee was aware that Ms Partridge has previously indicated that she no longer wishes to return to dental nursing, she would be able to return to practise at any time and continue putting patients at risk of harm, if a finding of current impairment were not made."

28. Accordingly, the PCC in May 2023 determined that Miss Partridge's fitness to practise remained impaired by reason of her misconduct. It extended the suspension order by a period of 12 months and directed a further review prior to the expiry of the 12-month period. The PCC in May 2023 reiterated the recommendations made by the previous PCCs. It also considered that any reviewing Committee would be assisted by *"An update about Ms Partridge's current circumstances and her future intentions in relation to her registration."*

Third resumed hearing – May 2024

29. The last resumed hearing in respect of Miss Partridge's case was held on 2 May 2024. The hearing was conducted on the papers in the absence of both parties.

30. The PCC in May 2024 determined that Miss Partridge's fitness to practise remained impaired, stating as follows:

"...The Committee has not been provided with any evidence from Miss Partridge to suggest that she has developed insight into, or has taken steps to remedy, her misconduct. The Committee considers that there is therefore a continued risk of Miss Partridge repeating her misconduct, and with it a risk of harm to the public.

The Committee also considers that a finding of impairment is again required in the wider public interest in order to declare and uphold proper professional standards of conduct and behaviour and to maintain public trust and confidence in the profession on account of the nature and seriousness of Miss Partridge's unremediated misconduct. The Committee considers that a reasonable and informed member of the public would be shocked and troubled if a finding of impairment were not made in the particular circumstances of this case."

31. The PCC in May 2024 extended the suspension order by a further period of 12 months and directed a review shortly before the end of the 12-month period. In directing another review, the PCC in May 2024 stated the following:

“Although this Committee in no way wishes to bind or fetter the Committee which will review the suspension, it considers that the reviewing Committee may be assisted by evidence of Miss Partridge’s meaningful engagement with the GDC and the regulatory process, a reflective statement demonstrating her insight into, and understanding of, her failings, and an update about Miss Partridge’s current circumstances and her future intentions in relation to her registration.”

Today’s resumed hearing – 8 May 2025

32. This is the fourth review of the substantive suspension order first imposed on Miss Partridge’s registration in May 2022. The matter is being considered today on the basis of the papers with neither party in attendance.

33. In comprehensively reviewing the current order of suspension, the Committee considered all the evidence within the indexed review hearing bundle. It also had regard to the written submissions provided by the GDC. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.

34. No documents or written submissions were received from, or on behalf of, Miss Partridge.

35. The Committee had regard to the chronology of events since the last resumed hearing. It noted that on 3 May 2024, the GDC emailed Miss Partridge regarding the determination of the last PCC in May 2024. On 16 May 2024 and 2 February 2025, the GDC emailed Miss Partridge to remind her of the recommendations of the PCC in May 2024. Although delivery receipts were received for these emails, no response was received from Miss Partridge.

36. In its written submissions in respect of today’s review, the GDC submitted that:

“The Committee will be aware that the persuasive burden that the Registrant’s fitness to practise is no longer impaired lies with the Registrant (Abrahaem v General Medical Council [2008] EWHC 183 (Admin))...

...there is no evidence to show any material change in position since the last hearing which reduces the risks identified by the previous Committee. The Registrant has continued to fail to engage with the Council and there remains an absence of any information in respect of [her] insight and remediation into the concerns raised. The previous Committee noted that the reviewing Committee would be assisted by evidence of meaningful engagement with the GDC and regulatory processes. The Registrant has not engaged with the Council or provided any indication that she will engage with the upcoming hearing or the Council’s proceedings.

The Registrant has failed to demonstrate sufficient insight and remediation of her misconduct to be able to conclude that her fitness to practise is no longer impaired. The Council submit that the lack of engagement, along with a failure to demonstrate insight and remediation suggests that the risk of repetition cannot be said to be unlikely, and therefore the Registrant poses a risk to the public. Further, the Council submit that an informed member of the public would be rightfully surprised if the suspension order were permitted to lapse in circumstances where the Registrant has failed to meaningfully engage with the Council since prior to April 2022.

For the reasons outlined above the Council submit that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired by reason of misconduct".

37. It was the GDC's submission that the indefinite suspension of Miss Partridge's registration is appropriate and proportionate at this review, given her lack of engagement in this matter. The GDC submitted that *"Indefinite suspension may focus the Registrant to engage with the Council and reflect upon the importance of providing the Council with evidence of her insight and remediation. Further, indefinite suspension will save the Council the costs of any additional hearings in circumstances where the Registrant continues not to engage. It was further submitted that "any lesser sanction would not adequately protect patient's interests and would serve to undermine public confidence in the profession".*

Decision on current impairment

38. The Committee first considered whether Miss Partridge's fitness to practise remains impaired by reason of her misconduct. In doing so, it exercised its independent judgement. It had regard to the over-arching objective of the GDC, which is: the protection, promotion and maintenance of the health, safety and well-being of the public; the promotion and maintenance of public confidence in the dental profession; and the promotion and maintenance of proper professional standards and conduct for the members of the dental profession.

39. The Committee took into account that the persuasive burden rests with Miss Partridge to demonstrate that she has addressed her past impairment. It noted, however, that there is no evidence at this review of any material change in the circumstances of this case since the last resumed hearing in May 2024. In fact, Miss Partridge has not engaged with the GDC since April 2022.

40. The matters found proved against Miss Partridge were serious and the Committee considered that her ongoing lack of engagement with the fitness to practise process is a significant concern. Miss Partridge breached fundamental standards by failing to protect confidentiality, being dishonest with her employer, and failing to cooperate with the investigation conducted by the GDC. In view of her continued disengagement, there is no evidence before the Committee today to reassure it that Miss Partridge no longer poses a risk to the public. Accordingly, the Committee could only conclude that there remains a risk of repetition. In the circumstances, the Committee determined that a finding of impairment is necessary for the protection of the public.

41. The Committee further determined that a finding of impairment is required in the wider public interest. It took into account the gravity of Miss Partridge's misconduct, which also included her inappropriate and aggressive behaviour towards her regulatory body. In the Committee's view, members of the public would be highly concerned if Miss Partridge were permitted to return to unrestricted practice, given the absence of any evidence of insight, remorse or remediation over a number of years. It was the judgement of the Committee that public confidence in the dental profession would be seriously undermined if a finding of impairment were not made. It also took into account the need to maintain and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour.

42. The Committee therefore determined that Miss Partridge's fitness to practise remains impaired by reason of her misconduct.

Decision on sanction

43. The Committee next considered what action to take in respect of Miss Partridge's registration. It had regard to section 36Q(1) of the Act, which sets out the options available to it at this review.

44. The Committee took into account the '*Guidance for the Practice Committees including Indicative Sanctions Guidance* (effective from October 2016; last revised in December 2020)'. It noted that the purpose of any sanction is not to be punitive, although it may have that effect, but to protect the public and the wider public interest. The Committee applied the principle of proportionality, balancing the public interest with Miss Partridge's own interests.

45. There is no evidence to indicate that Miss Partridge has insight into her misconduct or that she has addressed any of the concerns raised by the previous Committees. In the circumstances, this Committee determined that it would be wholly inappropriate to terminate the current suspension order and take no further action. A risk of repetition has been identified, and taking no action would not serve to protect the public or uphold the wider public interest.

46. The Committee considered whether to terminate the current suspension order and replace it with a conditions of practice order. It determined however, that conditional registration would not be appropriate, given that the matters in this case relate to behavioral and attitudinal concerns, as opposed to any concerns about Miss Partridge's clinical practice. The Committee also took into account Miss Partridge's disengagement from this process and was not confident that she would comply with any conditions even if they could be imposed. It therefore concluded that a conditions of practice order would not be sufficient to protect the public and the wider public interest.

47. The Committee next considered whether to suspend Miss Partridge's registration for a further specified period up to a maximum of 12 months. In doing so, it took into account that Miss Partridge's registration has now been suspended for a number of years, with no material change in the circumstances of this case. The Committee considered that Miss Partridge has had ample opportunity to re-engage but has, in the Committee's view, demonstrated a flagrant disregard for her regulatory body and its processes. There has been no indication from her of any willingness to address and remediate her misconduct. For these reasons, the Committee decided against a further period of suspension. It was not persuaded that a further extension of the current order would serve any meaningful purpose.

48. In reaching its decision, the Committee was satisfied that the public interest outweighs Miss Partridge's own interests in this particular case. It also took into account fairness to the GDC, in terms of the effort and expense incurred from having to review the matters in this case. This is the fourth review with no engagement from Miss Partridge. The Committee considered that the onus should now rest with her to contact the GDC if she is willing to re-engage with its processes.

49. Accordingly, the Committee directs the indefinite suspension of Miss Partridge's registration in accordance with section 36Q(1)(d) of the Act. In making this direction, the Committee was satisfied that the criteria for imposing an indefinite suspension are met.

50. Unless Miss Partridge exercises her right of appeal, her registration will be suspended indefinitely, 28 days from the date that notice of this direction is deemed to have been served upon her. In the event that she does exercise her right of appeal, the suspension order currently in place on her registration will remain in force until the resolution of the appeal.

51. That concludes this determination.