

11th January 2005
NEWS RELEASE

Convicted occupational therapist struck off by health regulator

An occupational therapist who was convicted of two alcohol related offences has been struck off by the Health Professions Council (HPC).

A panel of the Conduct and Competence Committee of the Health Professions Council met yesterday to hear the case of Deborah Fitzgerald. They met to review the order made by the Committee on 22nd February 2004 which was due to expire 21st February 2005.

Sandy Yule, chair of the panel, said...

"We have read and taken into account all the material before us. It appears that the registrant has been convicted of a further alcohol related offence. This is relevant to our deliberations given that it appears that the registrant is still suffering from alcohol dependency which is plainly relevant to her fitness to practice. We have, however, disregarded the apparent fact of conviction in our deliberations; we have concentrated upon the circumstances relating to the original allegation which concerned drink driving whilst just under four times the legal limit. It is plain from the material then before the committee on 3rd September 2003 and the registrants own representations at that time that she accepted that she suffered from alcohol dependency for which she had sought and was continuing to receive treatment. In the light of those representations the Committee imposed a Conditions of Practice Order which allowed her to practice provided she continued with her rehabilitation programme for a period of two years and, further, that she provided satisfactory evidence of compliance with her treatment programme to the HPC every three months.

"Regrettably no such evidence was provided and this resulted in a suspension order being made on 22nd February 2004. It is that order we now consider. Throughout the whole period from September 2003, despite requests no further information from Ms Fitzgerald has been forthcoming and there is no evidence that she has been in contact with the HPC. In these circumstances we consider that the interests and safety of the public require that Ms Fitzgerald name is struck off the register under Article 29 (5) (a) with effect from 22nd February 2005."

As she is no longer registered with the HPC, Deborah Fitzgerald will not be able to practise using the legally protected title 'occupational therapist' for the minimum period of five years following the end of her appeal period of 28 days.

The Health Professions Council is a UK-wide health regulator set up to protect the public. It sets standards for twelve health professions. The HPC only registers people who meet its standards for their professional skills, behaviour and health.