

Communiqué

Fifth meeting of the Medical Board of Australia 24 February 2010

The Board is established under the *Health Practitioner Regulation (Administrative Arrangements) National Law Act 2008*. At its fifth meeting in Melbourne, the Board focused on its priorities in preparing for the introduction of the national registration and accreditation scheme and on preparatory work to enable it to fulfil its statutory functions from 1 July 2010. Much of the meeting focused on finalising registration standards and considering other implementation issues. The Board also started work on developing a framework for the delegation of key operational decisions. In finalising registration standards for limited registration for area of need and for postgraduate training and supervised practice, the Board was assisted by the more than 30 submissions it had received. The constructive, intelligent and thoughtful contributions to the consultative process have resulted in a complete re-write of the standards, making them more robust and useful. The registration standards have been submitted to the Ministerial Council for approval and can be accessed at www.medicalboard.gov.au.

Specialist Register

There was intense interest and input from the profession about the establishment of the specialist register. Many colleges, professional associations, craft groups and individuals made submissions to the Board about this. There were two significant issues that arose:

1. Vocationally registered general practitioners

The Board had previously decided to include general practice on the specialist register and included this with other recommendations to Health Ministers for approval. In addition, the Board considered whether to include general practitioners with vocational registration on the specialist register as specialist general practitioners.

The Board carefully considered the submissions received on this issue, noting that the vocational register was established in 1990 and closed in 1996. The Board decided to include general practitioners with vocational registration on the specialist register. In doing so, the Board noted that this was a one-off transitional arrangement and recognised that these medical practitioners had been participating in continuing education to maintain their vocational registration and have provided valuable services to their communities. A media statement on this issue is published on the Board's website ([Medical Board Announcement on Vocationally Registered GPs](#)).

2. Specialist Register

a. Titles to include

The fields of practice included on the specialist register closely mirror the fields of practice on the Australian Medical Council's specialist list. The exception is for paediatrics where the Board has recommended the expansion of the specialty areas to mirror the adult physician specialties.

The Board received requests to recognise additional fields of practice, expand current fields of practice and to include alternative training programs of AMC accredited specialist colleges. The Board has confined its approved list to that of the AMC, but will accept future submissions from Colleges for additional fields of practice and additional specialties after the AMC has formally accredited and recognised these additional areas.

b. Protection of title

Some professional associations and Colleges submitted that the Board should protect many commonly used titles for each profession. Concerns were expressed that nonqualified persons may use the titles that are not protected and therefore compromise public safety. The Board chose to protect a single title for each field of practice and noted that the National Law imposes significant protections for the public against individuals who hold themselves out to be specialists and are not qualified to do so. This law applies regardless of whether or not the specific title was protected. Fines of up to \$30,000 are applicable. In this way, the specialist register will be an additional safeguard for the public.

Mandatory Reporting

The Board is aware of the professions' concerns about the new mandatory reporting obligations required under the National Law. The Board has approved draft guidelines about mandatory reporting that provide guidance and explain more fully the obligations of health professionals. The Board will be consulting on the content of these guidelines during March and encourages everyone with an interest in this important issue to make a submission to the Board.

Advertising Guidelines

The Board also approved draft guidelines in relation to advertising by health professionals. The guidelines aim to assist practitioners in the interpretation of the National Law as it applies to advertising. Once again, the Board will be consulting about these guidelines in the next month and welcomes submissions.

Scheduled Medicine Endorsements

The Board also considered arrangements under the National Law through which the National Boards for Nursing and Midwifery, Optometry and Podiatry are seeking to grant scheduled medicines endorsements for suitably qualified registrants. The Board endorsed a proposal for the establishment of a Scheduled Medicines Expert Advisory Group, whose membership will include medical practitioners with relevant expertise. The Board also emphasised the importance of the Expert Advisory Group considering the particular issues that arise when prescribing for children and the importance of all prescribers coordinating prescribing for individual patients.

Delegations

The Board considered what decisions it will delegate, recognising that state and territory Boards will continue to play an important role in the registration and regulation of medical practitioners. The Board had already decided that all matters to do with the registration of individual practitioners and with investigations of notifications will be handled by state and territory boards. The Board agreed that the state and territory Boards will be supported by a range of subcommittees. The detailed structure for each state and territory will depend on the volume and complexity of registrations and notifications they manage.

Registration Fees The Board will be setting the 2010-2011 registration fees at its meeting in March and this will be communicated to the profession in April.

Registration Transition Arrangements

All registered health practitioners will be advised by letter towards the end of April 2010 about the transition to the national registration and accreditation scheme. The letter will detail personal registration status and outline what is required to ensure a safe transition to the National Scheme.

The Board urges medical practitioners to read that correspondence carefully, as the letter is an important step in the process of validating registration information that will be held by the Board. Under the National Law, some of this information will be published online on a publicly accessible National Register. Details about what information will be publicly available and published on the Board's website.

The Board also encourages all registrants to ensure their contact details held by their current registration board are up to date before June 2010.

Regular updates and FAQs will be published on the National Board website at (www.medicalboard.gov.au).

Conclusion

The Board once again acknowledged the continuing efforts of existing State and Territory boards in preparing for implementation of the National Scheme while continuing to fulfil their current statutory functions. The Board specifically acknowledged the efforts of the staff of the state and territory boards whose workloads have increased as they contribute to the development of the National Scheme, while also undertaking their day to day work.

The Board is grateful to the Australian Medical Council for its guidance and support in matters related to registration and accreditation.

Since the last Board meeting, Martin Fletcher, the Agency CEO and other senior executive staff have started work. The Board is working collaboratively with the Agency and is grateful for the support and assistance that is being provided.

Dr Joanna Flynn

Chair, Medical Board of Australia

5 March 2010