

Communiqué

Medical Board of Australia meeting: 20 February 2013

The Medical Board of Australia (the Board) is established under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

Health Programs for Doctors

The Medical Board has an important role in relation to practitioners who have an impairment, that is an illness or disability that is likely to detrimentally affect their capacity to practice safely. The Board must assess the risk to the public that the practitioner may pose and if necessary take steps to monitor their health and/or restrict their practice.

In addition to this role, the National Law specifically provides discretion for the Board to fund health programs for practitioners and medical students.

Most Australian states and territories have developed services to assist medical practitioners with health concerns. There is currently significant variation in the type and level of service offered by the existing programs around Australia, ranging from telephone advisory services, through to assessment and case management of practitioners. There is also significant variation in funding of these services. Many operate on the goodwill of volunteers while others have more substantial funding. In two states, doctors' health programs have continued to be funded through registration fees of medical practitioners raised by state medical boards prior to the introduction of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

The Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council asked the Board to consider continuing one such service - the Victorian Doctors Health Program - and to expand it nationally. On this basis, the Board consulted with stakeholders about whether the Board has a role in funding external health programs for medical practitioners and if so, to what level and what services should be provided. The feedback from the consultation is published at www.medicalboard.gov.au. There was general support for the Board to fund health services for medical practitioners, but no agreement on what services should be funded. There was a widespread view that any program should be funded from within the Board's current registration fee, rather than requiring a specific fee increase.

The Board has now decided to fund an external health program or programs from the 2013/2014 financial year. Funding will be provided within existing resources and the Board does not foresee the need to increase registration fees for this purpose.

The Board is now focussing on planning what model of external health services it will fund. As a starting point, the Board has clearly defined its role and responsibilities in relation to managing impaired practitioners under the National Law. Clear delineation between the regulatory role of the Board in managing impaired practitioners and the role of an external health program in supporting doctors and promoting doctors' health is critical to managing risk to the public and avoiding confusion for practitioners.

One of the principles underpinning the Boards planning is to provide equitable access to doctors' health programs for all practitioners. The Board will keep the profession informed about progress with this important initiative in the months ahead. The Board has also issued a media release on this issue.

Review of registration standards, guidelines and codes

The first 10 National Boards to enter the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme) developed standards, guidelines and codes for its commencement on 1 July 2010. These standards, guidelines and codes were scheduled for review at least every three years.

The National Boards will shortly be publicly consulting on these reviews. This will provide an opportunity for practitioners, the public and other stakeholders to provide feedback. When registration standards, guidelines and codes are common to all, or most, of the National Boards, the consultation will be coordinated across National Boards to make providing feedback easier.

The Medical Board will consult separately on the review of *Good Medical Practice: A code of conduct for doctors in Australia* and the other standards, guidelines and codes specific to the medical profession. Information about the consultations will be published progressively on the Board's [website](#). We encourage practitioners and the community to have a say.

Review of the pathways to registration

A nationally uniform assessment process for International Medical Graduates (IMGs) was implemented from 1 July 2008. This was an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments and resulted in the establishment of three nationally consistent assessment pathways for IMGs:

- Competent authority pathway
- Standard pathway
- Specialist pathway

All IMGs who apply for limited registration for postgraduate training or supervised practice or limited registration for area of need are required to fulfill the requirements of one of the pathways.

The National Scheme has opened up opportunities to streamline and simplify the assessment and registration of IMGs. The 2011 report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, after its inquiry into the registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors, made recommendations about reducing red tape, duplication and administrative hurdles faced by IMGs while ensuring that the Australian standard continues to be rigorously applied.

The Board has reviewed the IMG assessment pathways and is proposing changes to the:

- Competent authority pathway
- Specialist pathway.

The Board is currently undertaking a focused preliminary consultation on proposed changes, to test the feasibility of the proposals and will then consult more widely.

Accreditation decisions

One of the objectives of the National Law is to facilitate the provision of high quality education and training of health practitioners. The accreditation function is the primary way of achieving this. The National Law defines the respective roles of the Board and its appointed accreditation authority, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), in the accreditation of medical schools and medical specialist colleges and in the development and approval of registration standards.

Accreditation of specialist colleges

The AMC is responsible for accrediting individual programs of study after it is reasonably satisfied that:

1. the program of study meets an accreditation standard or
2. substantially meets an approved accreditation standard and the imposition of conditions on the approval will ensure the program meets the standard within a reasonable time frame.

The AMC can also refuse to accredit a program of study.

The AMC must give the Board a report after it decides to accredit a program of study (with or without conditions).

After being given an accreditation report, the Board may approve, or refuse to approve, the accredited program of study as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration. An approval may be granted subject to conditions.

The Board approved the following accredited programs of study:

Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The Board approved the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) time-limited pathway to fellowship (FRACP) for trainees in intensive care medicine or paediatric intensive care medicine as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration as a specialist physician. Approval of the qualification is until 31 December 2014. This is consistent with the approval period for all the RACP's accredited pathways.

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists

The Board approved the accredited education and training program in anaesthesia and the continuing professional development program of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) and the accredited education and training program in pain medicine and the continuing professional development program of the ANZCA Faculty of Pain Medicine as providing qualifications for the purposes of specialist registration. Approvals of the qualifications are until 31 December 2018.

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists

The Board approved the accredited radiology and radiation oncology education and training programs and continuing professional development programs of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration. Approval of the qualification is until 31 December 2014.

Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine

The Board approved the accredited professional development program and the accredited three pathways (the Vocational Preparation Pathway, the Remote Vocational Training Scheme Pathway and the Independent Pathway) leading to fellowship of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (FACRRM) as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration. Approval of the qualification is until 31 December 2014.

A tribute to Associate Professor Peter Woodruff

Associate Professor Peter Woodruff recently retired from his position as Chair of the Queensland Board of the Medical Board of Australia. The Board appreciates Professor Woodruff's contribution to the Queensland community and his leadership of the Queensland Board.

Dr Christopher Kennedy has agreed to be Acting Chair until the Queensland Minister for Health makes a definitive appointment.

Dr Joanna Flynn AM

Chair, Medical Board of Australia

4 March 2013