

## Information on Returning to Practice

13 April 2011

### Background

Medical practitioners may stop practising for a range of reasons. When they return to practice, they are required to comply with the requirements in the Medical Board of Australia's (the Board's) recency of practice registration standard.

The Board's role is defined in the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory and includes protecting the public through the registration and regulation of medical practitioners. The Board must be satisfied that medical practitioners, who want to return to practice after an absence, have the competence to provide safe care in their medical practice.

Medical practitioners who seek to return to practice whether or not they are registered, must meet the requirements for registration defined in the National Law and must comply with the Board's registration standards. This paper supports the Board's registration standard for recency of practice and provides information on how to comply with the standard.

### Scope

This information applies to medical practitioners who have not practised for more than one year and who wish to return to practice, whether or not they are registered.

### Procedure and Requirements

A medical practitioner applying for general or specialist registration must demonstrate that they are qualified, suitable and eligible for registration including that he or she:

1. is a suitable person for registration. That is, the practitioner does not have an impairment, a criminal history or professional disciplinary history that may impact or is relevant to his or her ability to practise
2. will meet the recency of practice registration standard
3. will meet the continuing professional development registration standard during the period of registration
4. will meet the professional indemnity insurance registration standard and
5. will meet any other registration standard or requirement of the Board.

When the Board considers an application for registration and where the applicant has been absent from practice for more than one year, the Board will take the following factors into consideration:

- length of absence from practice
- level of experience prior to the absence from practice
- any continuing professional development, education or professional contact maintained during the absence
- the intended field of practice, including the role and position proposed.

## Recency of practice registration standard

### **2 years or more prior experience and absent from practice between one and three years**

A practitioner who has previously had more than two years experience but has not practised for between one and up to three years is required to complete the equivalent of one year's continuing professional development (CPD) activities relevant to the intended scope of practice prior to the commencement of practice.

### **2 years or more prior experience and absent from practice for three or more years**

A practitioner who has previously had more than two years experience but has not practised for three or more years is required to provide a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice. This may include a range of activities including working under supervision and completing specific education and/or assessment.

### **Less than 2 years experience and absent from practice for more than 12 months**

A practitioner who has had less than two years experience prior to the absence and has not practised for more than 12 months is required to commence work under supervision in a training position approved by the Board.

## Plan for professional development and re-entry to practice

Practitioners who have previously had more than two years experience prior to the absence and are returning to practice after an absence of three or more years are required to submit a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice for the Board's approval. This is regardless of whether the practitioner currently holds registration.

The purpose of the plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice is to ensure that the practitioner is returning to safe practice with appropriate supports in place. This is for the safety of patients and the practitioner.

The plan for professional development and re-entry to practice will be different for each practitioner. It should be tailored to the practitioner's particular circumstances and their individual learning needs. It is therefore not appropriate for the Board to issue a standard re-entry plan with set tasks or supervision levels.

However, practitioners have requested assistance on how to develop a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice. This document provides a framework that a practitioner can use to guide them and provides information about the typical elements of a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice.

Assistance in developing a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice may be obtained from:

- specialist colleges
- prospective or past supervisors
- prospective employers
- colleagues and mentors

The terms of a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice usually should be negotiated with the prospective supervisor who is appropriately qualified in the area of intended practice. It should take into consideration:

1. the practitioner's specific learning needs, taking past education, experience and training into consideration and
2. the requirements of the specific position that the practitioner is proposing to work in.

A plan for professional development and re-entry to practice should:

- define the terms of an agreement between a proposed supervisor and the practitioner
- state the previous field of practice and the intended field of practice
- identify any gaps in knowledge and skills
- identify any training or education requirements, including programs run by the relevant college that will be undertaken to meet learning requirements
- articulate goals, expected outcomes and clear timeframes for achievement of goals
- propose the level of supervision, mentoring or peer review that may be required for a safe return to practice
- describe the orientation to the proposed employer's workplace
- allocate time for regular formal feedback or performance reviews by the proposed supervisor, any feedback or review should be recorded and signed by the supervisor and the practitioner
- provide the anticipated completion date for the re-entry to practice plan
- articulate the measures that will be put in place if the stated goals are not achieved in the stated timeframes
- include a written job offer on the organisation's letterhead which is signed and dated by an authorised person. The job offer should clearly indicate the intended field of practice, the position description and the type of employment (e.g. full-time/ part-time, employee/contractor etc).

If a practitioner does not have a proposed supervisor, he or she is still required to submit a re-entry plan based on his or her own self-assessment and the plan should include the relevant elements as outlined above.

To assist practitioners, the Board has developed a re-entry plan template (attached) which makes provision for the elements that should be included in a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice. The plan, with the exception of the "Practitioner and Supervisor Agreement" may be modified or adapted to suit individual needs or replaced by a specialist college re-entry plan.

### Changing your field of practice

A practitioner who intends to change their field of practice will be required to consult with the relevant specialist college and develop a professional development plan for entering the new field of practice for the consideration of the Board.

If the change is to a subset of previous practice and the practitioner has not been absent from practice for a year or more, there are no additional requirements.

If the change is an extension of practice that the practitioner's peers might reasonably expect from a practitioner in that field, the practitioner is required to undertake any training that peers would expect before taking up the new area of practice.

### Practitioners returning from overseas practice

A practitioner who has been practising in a jurisdiction outside Australia will meet the recency of practice standard provided that they:

- have not been absent from practice for a year or more and
- are not intending to change their field of practice .

### Consideration of a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice

It is a professional responsibility for medical practitioners to work within their limits of competence. The Board expects that practitioners have the necessary level of insight to realise those limits of competence. A plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice should demonstrate to the Board that the practitioner (with assistance from prospective employers and/or supervisors, if relevant) has assessed their level of competence and has assessed their learning needs and how to meet those learning needs. The plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice should also demonstrate the structures that will be put in place, such as supervision, mentoring and regular feedback to ensure safe practice.

The Board may seek further information including seeking advice from the relevant specialist college, if it is not satisfied that the submitted plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice provides sufficient information about the safeguards for the return to practice.

The Board may also decide to formalise the re-entry plan by imposing conditions or accepting an undertaking from the practitioner.

The Board will require the practitioner's supervisor/s or mentor/s to confirm that the practitioner has complied with the plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice. Before releasing the practitioner from the obligations of the plan, the Board may require that their supervisor confirms that the practitioner's practice is of a sufficient standard to satisfy the Board that they do not require the additional supports.

### Auditing a practitioner's plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice

The Board may audit compliance with the plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice at any time.

### Associated Documents

1. Template – Plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice
2. Recency of practice registration standard