



International medical graduate (IMG) supervision

7 November 2012

Survey of IMG perceptions of supervision arrangements

Background

The Medical Board of Australia was aware of concerns that the supervision of some IMGs with limited registration who are working in general practice may not comply with the Board's guidelines *Supervised practice for limited registration*.

Concerns raised about specific IMGs or supervisors have been addressed as notifications consistent with Part 8 of the National Law or as appropriate in NSW. However, the Board wanted to understand if there was a wider issue about IMG supervision to be addressed. It decided to commission a small survey to:

- gather information about the supervision of practitioners with limited registration who are working in general practices in Victoria
- identify gaps between the Board's current guidelines for supervision of IMGs and actual practice and
- identify priority areas for the review of the Board's supervision guidelines.

Survey scope

The survey invited feedback from 50 IMGs with limited registration for area of need working in Victoria in general practice. Participants were randomly selected and represented close to 25% of all IMGs with limited registration for area of need working in Victorian general practices.

Survey participants were assured that their identity would remain confidential and 46 IMGs agreed to participate in the survey. The Board was not informed of the identity of the survey participants or their practice location. Of the 50 selected, two declined and two had competing commitments so could not participate.

Methodology

A project officer appointed by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with participants. The project officer was experienced in issues of IMG assessment, registration and supervision. The questions focused on:

- supervision arrangements
- the adequacy of supervision
- the relationship between the IMG and supervisor
- exploring the IMGs' understanding of, and compliance with, Board guidelines.

Findings

- Most IMGs reported a positive relationship with their supervisors and said they felt that their supervisors were responsive to their needs, accessible and took their supervision responsibilities seriously. Very few IMGs reported being unable to contact a supervisor for an urgent clinical matter.
- All survey participants said they felt comfortable approaching their supervisor about deficits in their learning.
- Most participants said their supervisors actively approached them about perceived deficits in their learning and encouraged their professional development.
- Most participants felt adequately supervised in their current positions; that the type and amount of supervision was adequate; and their current working environment allowed them to review and develop their practice in a constructive and supportive way.
- 45 out of 46 IMGs said that they had received adequate orientation to the organisational policies and procedures of the practice.
- IMGs who worked in locum positions, after hours positions or without another medical practitioner on site appeared to be less supported by supervisors. This is taken into consideration when the Board decides on the supervision levels required by each IMG.
- Most IMGs were aware of the Board's supervision guidelines and said they complied with them. They knew who their allocated supervisor was and discussed work reports with their supervisor before they were submitted to the Board.
- Many IMGs reported that the Board's supervision guidelines were too onerous and required too much supervision, given the IMGs' level of experience. The guidelines were also considered too administratively onerous.

Survey limitations

The information collected in the survey is interesting. However, the Board has assessed the implications of the findings with caution. Responses were 'self reported' by IMGs who may have had a vested interest in providing positive feedback about their supervision. The information collected could not be independently verified. Further, the survey sample size of 46 IMGs is very small and not statistically significant.

Next steps

The Board has decided to establish a working party to review the supervision requirements of IMGs and advise whether changes to the supervision guidelines are necessary.