

Medical Board of Australia consultation on the funding of external doctors' health programs

Submission received from: **Dr Sandra M. Hacker AO**

Question 1: Is there a need for health programs?

Do you see any value in, or need for external health programs for medical students and/or doctors? Please explain your reasoning

As a psychiatrist with an awareness of the difficulty that medical practitioners have in seeking especially mental health advice and treatment and in particular the problems facing female medical practitioners (who have a much higher incidence of mental health problems and a reported higher suicide rate than the general population and male medical practitioners) I initially served on the Victorian Doctor's Health Advisory C'ttee and then worked to establish and serve on the Board of the initial Victorian Doctors Health Service.

I have treated a significant number of doctors and medical students and believe that timely referral to suitable practitioners either self referred or via the VDHP (or through the former Victorian Medical Practitioners Board Health C'ttee) have assisted many doctors to remain in or return to practice thus benefitting not only themselves but the general community.

I also sit on the Victorian Medical Benevolent Association which assists doctors with financial matters often precipitated by health issues

Question 2: Preferred model for external health programs

Of the existing models in Australia as described above, is there a model that you would prefer to see adopted nationally? Is there an alternative model that you would like to see adopted nationally?

As one of the medical practitioners that established the VDHP I believe that this model most suitably serves ill doctors. It has been used by the former VMPB to refer doctors, has been professionally oversighted by a Board and employs suitably qualified people to provide a range of services, and is capable of conducting education and research.

Question 3: The role of the Board in funding external health programs

Do you believe that it is the role of the Board to fund external health programs?

Given the potential loss of practitioners by suicide, drug dependence and other psychiatric illnesses it is I believe in the Board's interest to protect the public by enabling early seeking of treatment prior to complaints to the Board requiring formal investigation. Further the Board can utilise the services of the Program by referral if desirable thus having a trustworthy reliable means of assisting and attempting to manage ill doctors who may pose practice problems via referral from the Board's Health C'ttee.

Funding thus can attempt to protect the public and assist in returning the community's investment in training doctors by enabling those who recover to return to practice.

Question 4: Range of services provided by doctors' health programs

What services should be provided by doctors' health programs. In addition to the ones you have selected, what other services (if any) should be provided by doctors' health programs?

Telephone advice available 24/7

Referral to expert practitioners for assessment and management

Develop and maintain a list of practitioners who are willing to treat colleagues

Education services for medical practitioners and medical students to raise awareness of health issues for the medical profession and to encourage practitioners and students to have a general practitioner

Programs to enhance the skills of medical practitioners who assess and manage the health of doctors

Case management and monitoring (including workplace monitoring) the progress of those who voluntarily enter into Case Management agreements (or similar) with the service

Follow up of all participants contacting or attending the service

Assistance in finding support for re-entry to work and rehabilitation

Research on doctors' health issues

Publication of resources – maintaining a website, newsletters, journal articles

Other services (please list)

Question 5: Funding

How much of an increase in registration fees is acceptable to you, to fund doctors' health services?

>\$40

Question 6: Other comments

Do you have any other comments or feedback about external health programs?