Media Release

8 November 2010

Few 'non-returns' in medical registration renewal

Fewer than 2% of the nearly 40,000 medical practitioners due to renew their registration at the end of September have not renewed before the end of the one month 'grace period' provided by the National Law.

In the first mass medical registration renewal since the introduction of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) mailed 39, 313 registration renewal reminders to medical practitioners whose annual registration was due on 30 September 2010.

Under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory, practitioners who do not renew by the due date remain registered for one month after their renewal is due. If they do not renew by the end of this 'grace period', by law AHPRA must remove their name from the Register of practitioners and therefore, their patients will not be eligible for a Medicare rebate.

Of the 39,313 medical practitioners due to renew on 30 September 2010, only 1.6% (651) practitioners who previously held General and/or Specialist registration did not renew by 31 October 2010. A further 522 who previously held Non-practising registration or Limited registration (Public interest – Occasional practice) may have chosen not to renew. The average rate of non-renewals in previous years is estimated between 1% and 20% and is subject to state-by-state variation.

At 5pm Friday 5 November 2010, AHPRA provided Medicare Australia with a final list of practitioners who did not renew by the end of the grace period. Medicare Australia will take appropriate action from Monday 8 November 2010. AHPRA has given Medicare a dedicated telephone line so practitioners who are no longer registered and who wish to practise can apply to 'fast-track' their registration application in one-off process approved by the Medical Board of Australia for a short time only.

Every registered practitioner is responsible for renewing their registration each year. In an effort to make sure everyone who was due to renew for the first time in the National Scheme was aware of their responsibility to do so, in the last month AHPRA:

- Mailed two registration renewal reminders to all practitioners who were due to renew and had not

- Sent SMS and email reminders to all medical practitioners (for whom it had contact details) who had not renewed by mid-October

- Made personal phone calls to the practitioners for whom it had telephone contact details

- Worked with professional associations, specilialist colleges, employers and health departments to remind practitioners of the need to renew

- Established a 'bulk-check' online capacity so employers can check the registration of large groups of employees at once

The Medical Board of Australia also distributed a newsletter in October to all registrants, which included three renewal reminders.

AHPRA CEO, Martin Fletcher, said it was not clear how many practitioners had chosen not to renew and how many would be seeking to renew their registration next week.

"AHPRA has done everything it could to make sure no-one who was due to renew was unaware of the need to do so," Mr Fletcher said.

"However, this year as in previous years, we expect there will be practitioners who were due to renew and who intend to practise, but who did not renew on-time," he said.

Anticipating this, the Medical Board of Australia has for a short time only introduced a 'fast track' application process that enables practitioners who have been previously registered to apply to renew without providing proof of identity, verification of qualifications, registration history, work history or declaration of Continuing Professional Development. The Board also waived a late fee for 2010 renewals. However, a Criminal History check must still be completed – this is done by an external agency and an average 48-hour turnaround time applies.

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