



12 April 2012

Dr Joanna Flynn  
Chair  
Medical Board of Australia  
National Office  
GPO 9958  
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Dear Dr Flynn

The Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA) is the peak professional body for orthopaedic surgeons in Australia. AOA provides high quality specialist education, training and continuing professional development. AOA is committed to ensuring the highest possible standard of orthopaedic care and is the leading authority in the provision of orthopaedic information to the community.

AOA is pleased to be able to provide a submission to the Medical Board consultation paper on the Board funding external doctors' health programs.

AOA believes that after review of the models available is that the most appropriate way forward is not to choose one particular model to be implemented nationally but to utilise and improve the various local models that are already in place. Local models will have evolved over time in response to local needs and conditions and AOA believes it would not be appropriate to attempt to implement a national scheme over the top of the existing ones. Whichever model is chosen it must include case management with appropriate triage to a 24 hour on call doctor.

Voluntary referrals by the practitioner/surgeon/medical student are by far the most effective way of engaging the help that is absolutely necessary for many of these individuals. The fact that there is an experienced doctor on call 24 hours for referrals on an absolutely confidential basis should be an essential part of any model. The ability to promptly review colleagues and refer them to appropriate clinicians in a timely and sympathetic manner is a vital part of this model.

Some referrals may be compulsory referrals but majority as AOA understands are voluntary.

The confidential nature of the Victorian Doctors Health Project ensures appropriate treatment, rehabilitation and counselling to facilitate return to clinical and other duties in a timely and safe manner. This allows experienced medical staff and often specialists, including surgeons to

maintain their contribution to the patients, their profession and society without the obvious social embarrassment that may result in inadvertent and inappropriate publicity. It is imperative to maintain absolute confidentiality of the clinical details of doctors utilising any service such as this.

There are many people who have had significant health and addiction problems who have been helped by this Victorian model and have returned to effective and useful work.

The ability of the profession to look after itself in a timely, sympathetic and effective manner, decisions made by clinicians intimately aware of the psychological, social and professional implications of their practice should be maintained and developed.

On the issue of funding models of providing external doctors health programs AOA has no specific model that it would endorse but would strongly advocate that the funding arrangement should be managed via an independent body separate to the Medical Board of Australia.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Mercer', written in a cursive style.

Graham Mercer  
**President**