

Communiqué

15 December 2010: 15th meeting of the Medical Board of Australia

The Medical Board of Australia (the Board) is established under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory.

On 15 December 2010, the Board held a half day planning session and invited the Chairs of the State and Territory Boards to participate. The National Board then met and dealt primarily with issues related to accreditation of medical schools, colleges and accreditation standards.

Planning session

The Board's planning session covered two areas:

1. *Input into the development of an overarching strategy for delivering the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme*

The Scheme is made up of a number of groups. Internally, it includes 10 different health practitioner regulation Boards (chiropractic, dental, medicine, nursing and midwifery, optometry, osteopathy, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology), the Agency Management Committee which is in effect the Board of Management of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and the 500+ staff of AHPRA. Externally, there is a range of stakeholders who influence and are affected by the Scheme, including the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council, the Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee, accreditation agencies, health complaints entities, the professions, the community and many others.

Given the number of distinct groups that make up the Scheme, the Boards, Agency Management Committee and AHPRA decided that it would be helpful to develop a strategy for delivering the Scheme. This aims to build a shared understanding and alignment among the Boards, the Agency Management Committee and staff.

2. *Review of the Medical Board of Australia's work plan*

The Board reviewed the work plan it developed in March 2010, which includes:

- a. Governance and interaction with State and Territory Boards
- b. Communication with external stakeholders
- c. Policy and standards
- d. Accreditation
- e. Registrations
- f. Notifications
- g. Other projects and research

The Board noted that it had made significant progress with achieving much of the 2010 work plan. Priorities for 2011 include developing guidance on sexual boundaries and blood borne infectious diseases; improving communication and strengthening national consistency and in policy and standard development.

Accreditation

One of the objectives of the National Law is to facilitate the provision of high quality education and training of health practitioners. The accreditation function is the primary way of achieving this. The National Law defines the respective roles of the Board and its appointed accreditation authority, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), in the accreditation of medical schools and medical specialist colleges and in the development and approval of registration standards.

Accreditation standards

Under the National Law, the AMC is responsible for developing accreditation standards for the approval of the Board. Accreditation standards are used to assess whether a program of study, and the education provider that provides the program of study, provide persons who complete the program with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes to practise the profession. In developing accreditation standards, the AMC must undertake wide-ranging consultation about the content of the standard.

The AMC reviewed its accreditation standards on:

1. Assessment and accreditation of medical schools and
2. Specialist medical education and training programs and continuing professional development programs

In reviewing the accreditation standards, the AMC considered feedback from accreditation assessments and noted that the standards were generally well supported. The AMC focussed this review on minor changes to clarify meaning and to ensure alignment with any relevant registration requirements of the Board.

21 organisations commented on the medical school accreditation standards and 13 organisations commented on the standards for specialist education and training programs.

On the basis of the feedback, the AMC made minor changes to the standards. The AMC also assessed the changes to the standards against the AHPRA document *Procedures for the development of accreditation standards* (available at www.ahpra.gov.au).

The Board approved the accreditation standards that were developed by the AMC and has published them on its website. They are now in effect.

Accreditation of medical schools and specialist colleges

The AMC is responsible for accrediting individual programs of study after it is reasonably satisfied that:

1. the program of study meets an accreditation standard or
2. substantially meets an approved accreditation standard and the imposition of conditions on the approval will ensure the program meets the standard within a reasonable time frame.

The AMC can also refuse to accredit a program of study.

The AMC must give the Board a report after it decides to accredit a program of study (with or without conditions).

After being given an accreditation report, the Board may approve, or refuse to approve, the accredited program of study as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration. An approval may be granted subject to conditions.

Medical school accreditation reports

The Board considered the AMC's accreditation reports on the following medical schools:

1. James Cook University
2. University of Melbourne
3. University of Queensland

School of Medicine and Dentistry in the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Molecular Sciences – James Cook University

The Board approved the six-year MBBS undergraduate medical program of the School of Medicine and Dentistry in the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Molecular Sciences, James Cook University as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration in the medical profession, for a period of six years, until 31 December 2016.

The Melbourne Medical School, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, the University of Melbourne

The Board approved the six year MBBS undergraduate entry, and four and a half year graduate entry medical programs of the Melbourne Medical School, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, the University of Melbourne, as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration in the medical profession, until 31 December 2013 when the last cohort of students in these programs are expected to finish.

The Board approved the four year master degree program of the Melbourne Medical School, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, the University of Melbourne leading to the award of Doctor of Medicine (MD), as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration in the medical profession, for a period of six years until 31 December 2016.

The School of Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, the University of Queensland

The Board approved the MBBS medical program of the School of Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, the University of Queensland, as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration in the medical profession, for a period of six years until 31 December 2016. This includes approval of major changes to the MBBS program of the School of Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, the University of Queensland including to offer the medical program offshore through the Ochsner Clinical School and the implementation of Years 1 and 2 of the MBBS program at the University's Ipswich campus.

Specialist College Accreditation

The Board considered the AMC's accreditation reports on the education and training programs and continuing professional development programs of:

1. The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
2. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

The Board approved the education and training programs and the continuing professional development programs of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration in the medical profession until 31 December 2012.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The Board approved the education and training programs and the continuing professional development programs of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Divisions (Adult Medicine Division and Paediatrics & Child Health Division), the Faculties (Australasian Faculties of Public Health Medicine, Rehabilitation Medicine and Environmental and Occupational Medicine), and the Chapters (Australasian Chapters of Addiction Medicine, Palliative Medicine, and Sexual Health Medicine) as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration in the medical profession until 31 December 2014.

Accreditation of the intern year

The Board had previously asked the AMC to provide it with advice on:

1. The standards for intern training
2. What should be expected of interns at the completion of the intern period for granting general registration
3. How the AMC could apply a national framework for intern training accreditation to the existing state based accreditation processes to ensure that appropriate and consistent standards are in place in all jurisdictions

The Board recognises that this it is important to progress this work in the first half of 2011 if changes are to be made for the 2012 year. The Board will work with the AMC to develop and implement national standards for intern training. Stakeholders will be consulted as part of this process.

Registration

Definition of “practice”

After its last meeting, the Board reported that in response to feedback that the very broad definition of ‘practice’ used in the registration standards was causing difficulties, the Board had agreed to reduce the registration fee to \$125 for medical practitioners who formally agree (in writing) to restrict their practice to teaching or examining/assessing. This voluntary agreement will be on the public Register. These medical practitioners will also be required to provide the Board with a letter from the institution at which they are teaching or examining, confirming their appointment. The Board also reported further information about this process will be available after 1 February 2011, to allow for technical changes to be made to the IT system to support this change.

Recognising that this approach only partially addresses the issues arising from the definition of practice, at this meeting, the Board agreed to consult on the definition and to recommend to the Ministerial Council that the definition be revised if appropriate. A consultation paper will be prepared and stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback through the consultation process early in 2011.

Sponsorship of meetings by companies

The Board was asked about its position on the sponsorship of medical practitioners to attend educational meetings. The Board’s code of conduct, ‘Good Medical Practice’ is clear and states at 8.11.6 that:

Good medical practice involves not asking for or accepting any inducement, give or hospitality of more than trivial value, from companies that sell or market drugs or appliances that may affect, or be seen to affect, the way you prescribe for, treat or refer patients.

The Board confirmed that it will consider notifications about potential breaches of the code case by case.

Conclusion

The Board is very grateful for the assistance and support it has received since it was established. The transition to the new Scheme has had difficulties, both expected and unexpected. The Board appreciates the ongoing involvement and commitment of members of state and territory boards, and those who serve on Board panels and committees or undertake assessments on behalf of the Board. We particularly acknowledge the feedback and advice we have received from the Australian Medical Council, the medical colleges, the Australian Medical Association and individual practitioners and members of the community who have contributed to the development of national standards, policies and procedures. The Board also recognises the challenges and significant achievements of the staff of AHPRA who have brought the scheme to fruition. There is much work still to be done to ensure that the national scheme is effective and robust, but the end of the year provides an opportunity for reflection on the major achievement that is national registration. The scheme is the culmination of a decade of work by the profession and governments. The challenge now is to ensure that the scheme achieves its potential to bring long term benefits to Australia.

Further information on the work of the Board can be found at www.medicalboard.gov.au.

Dr Joanna Flynn
Chair, Medical Board of Australia

22 December 2010