



Communiqué

Meeting of the Medical Board of Australia: 24 August 2011

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.

At the August meeting the Board considered a range of matters including the progress of medical renewals of registration, the assessment of specialist IMGs and pre-employment structured clinical interviews.

House of Representatives inquiry into registration processes for international medical graduates

The Board was invited to appear as a witness for a second time at the House of Representatives inquiry into registration processes for international medical graduates (IMGs). I appeared accompanied by Ms Kym Ayscough, Manager, AHPRA NSW Office. The Committee's questions focused on supervision of IMGs and the potential conflicts of interest of supervisors, the use of the Pre-employment Structured Clinical interviews (see below) and on registration requirements for IMGs.

The Board looks forward to receiving the report of the Inquiry.

Registration issues

Renewal of medical registration

Close to 65,000 medical practitioners are due to renew their medical registration by 30 September 2011. The Board and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) recognise the importance of a smooth renewal process. There is an intensive renewal campaign in place that includes three email notices (when AHPRA has email addresses) and a number of letters reminding practitioners to renew before the registration expiry date.

At its meeting, the Board heard that 43% of medical practitioners who were due to renew by 30 September 2011 had already submitted applications for renewal and 98% of these applications have already been processed and approved. This number is increasing daily.

While AHPRA will send registration renewal reminders to the address practitioners have nominated and by email, the responsibility to renew rests with the individual practitioner. There will be a late fee applied to medical practitioners who do not apply to renew by the due date, but who apply to renew within one calendar month of expiry (the 'late renewal period' in the National Law). Those who do not apply to renew within one calendar month of their registration expiry date must, under the National Law, be removed from the register and make a new application for registration if they wish to continue to practise.

Assessment of specialist IMGs

Historically, responsibility for the assessment of specialist IMGs has rested largely with individual specialist colleges. In 1999, recognising the importance of uniform standards and processes, the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges (representing specialist colleges), the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and state and territory medical boards, established the Joint Standing Committee on Overseas Trained Specialists (JSCOTS).

The role of JSCOTS has changed since it was first established, reflecting a range of external influences including the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's authorisation case into the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 2002/3 and the Council of Australian Government's International Medical Graduate assessment initiative in 2008.

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme has also changed some of the traditional roles and accountabilities of organisations involved in the assessment of specialist IMGs. This provides an opportunity to review the processes, aiming where necessary, for improved efficiencies and increased transparency.

The registration of specialist IMGs is a feature of the National Law. The National Law provides for registration of specialist IMGs who have successfully completed any examination or assessment required by an approved registration standard, who have been assessed and have demonstrated their ability to competently and safely practise the specialty. The Board has decided that the assessment or examination will be conducted by the specialist colleges accredited by the AMC. At the request of the Board, AHPRA has appointed each AMC accredited specialist college to conduct the assessment of specialist IMGs. This appointment provides for colleges and their employees and assessors to have indemnity under the National Law.

The Board has published a registration standard for specialist registration, approved by Ministerial Council, in which the AMC accredited specialist colleges are confirmed as the bodies with the expertise to assess specialist IMGs. The registration standard for Specialist Registration is available at www.medicalboard.gov.au.

The Board recently convened a meeting with the AMC and some of the Colleges to scope issues around the roles, responsibilities, pathways and processes for the assessment of specialist IMGs under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. The Board agreed to establish a National Specialist IMG Committee to continue much of the work of JSCOTS. This Committee will be working with Colleges to develop more comprehensive agreements about the terms of their appointment under the National Law to conduct assessment of specialist IMGs.

Review of pre-employment structured clinical interviews

Limited registration can be granted to IMGs who are not qualified for general or specialist registration. One of the requirements in the registration standards for limited registration is that IMGs must provide satisfactory results of a pre-employment structured clinical interview (PESCI) for non-specialist positions, if the Board determines that a PESCI is necessary. The Board decides whether or not a PESCI is required, based on the nature of the position and the level of risk inherent in it. For example, the Board is likely to require a PESCI if an IMG is applying to work in general practice. If the IMG is applying to work in a junior hospital-based position, which is well supervised and supported it is less likely to require a PESCI.

PESCI are conducted by organisations accredited by the AMC. The PESCI involve the IMG undergoing a structured interview to determine whether they have the knowledge, skills and experience

to work in a specific role, to a set position description. The PESCI is conducted by trained assessors, the majority of whom must be medical practitioners with experience working in a similar type of practice as that in which the IMG is seeking to work. After the interview, the assessors prepare a report for the Board, to inform the Board's decision about whether to register the IMG to work in the specific position.

With the transition to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, there is an opportunity to review the conduct and reporting of PESCI to establish more consistent processes and reporting across jurisdictions and to consider whether PESCI results are transferable across similar risk positions.

The Board and the AMC will convene a meeting with PESCI providers to progress this.

Other work

There is a great deal of work being undertaken by AHPRA on a range of issues that will improve various businesses processes and reporting to the Board. At this meeting, the Board noted that:

- work has started on a project to support the audit of practitioner compliance with registration standards. This project is developing a framework for audit of the mandatory registration standards, including criminal history, recency of practice, continuing professional development and professional indemnity insurance
- the project to develop accreditation standards for acupuncture has progressed. There will be public consultation on the draft accreditation standards
- the delegation of the Board's powers are being reviewed and streamlined. High impact decisions affecting medical practitioners' registration will continue to be made by Board members whilst more routine decisions will be delegated to AHPRA staff
- there is a strategy being developed to improve reporting to the Board about notifications about registered practitioners
- the National Boards are working towards consistency of their standards and requirements. At this meeting, the Board considered work that had been done on registration standards for limited registration, much of which flows from the work already undertaken by the Medical Board
- there is a draft policy on how qualifications will be presented on the Register of Medical Practitioners. The Board confirmed that the primary medical qualification and any specialist qualifications that led to registration will be recorded on the Register. The Board is aware that qualifications are currently being inconsistently presented. This is because the qualifications transitioned to AHPRA from eight different databases and because a Specialist Register only existed in four states before July 2010. Further work will be done to cleanse qualifications data on the Register and to present these in a standard way.

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Chair, Medical Board of Australia

31 August 2011