



Communiqué

Medical Board of Australia meeting: 12 December 2012

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

Changes to the Australian Medical Council

The Board congratulated Professor Robin Mortimer who was recently elected President of the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and Associate Professor Jill Sewell who was elected Deputy President of the AMC.

The Board also paid tribute to Professor Richard Smallwood, the outgoing President of the AMC. Professor Smallwood has made an enormous contribution to medical education, both as a teacher and clinician, and through his most recent role on the AMC. Professor Smallwood's leadership, wisdom and common sense have been greatly appreciated by the Board.

Review of accreditation arrangements

The AMC was assigned the role of accreditation authority for the medical profession by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council before the commencement of the National Scheme for an initial period of three years.

Following a review that included wide-ranging public consultation, the Board has decided to continue this assignment with the AMC for a period of five years from 1 July 2013.

The AMC will continue to operate within the Quality Framework for the Accreditation Function agreed between the National Boards and the Accreditation Authorities. The annual agreement between AHPRA, on behalf of the Board, and the AMC will establish the program of work and funding each year.

Review of accreditation standards for medical schools and their program of study

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 of the program, provides graduates of the program with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes to practise the profession.

In early 2011 the AMC began a review of the accreditation standards for medical schools and their programs of study. Following wide-ranging stakeholder consultation, the AMC submitted the final revised accreditation standards to the Board for approval.

The revised accreditation standards have not changed the overall purpose of accreditation which is the recognition of medical programs that produce graduates who are competent to practise safely and effectively under supervision as interns in Australia and New Zealand, and who have an appropriate foundation for lifelong learning and for further training in any branch of medicine. There has also been no change to the current division of the accreditation standards into eight major subgroups.

The revised accreditation standards better integrate the graduate outcome statements with the standards and also include some additional sub-standards and changes to the wording of some standards to improve clarity and consistency.

The Board approved the revised accreditation standards for medical schools and their programs of study. The approved accreditation standards came into effect on 21 December 2012 and are published at www.medicalboard.gov.au under "Accreditation". The standards are also published on the AMC website at: www.amc.org.au.

Accreditation decisions

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 AMC, in the accreditation of medical schools and medical specialist colleges and in the development and approval of registration standards.

Accreditation of 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.

The Board approved the following accredited programs of study:

Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators

The Board approved the accredited education and training programs and continuing professional development program of the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration in the medical profession. Approval of the qualification is until 31 December 2014.

Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

The Board approved the accredited education and training programs covering training in the specialties of general pathology, anatomical pathology (including cytopathology), chemical pathology, haematology, immunology, microbiology, forensic pathology and the continuing professional development program of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia as providing a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration in the medical profession. Approval of the qualification is until 31 December 2016.

Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons

The Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons provides training in the specialty of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery is a medical specialty and a dental specialty. The training in this specialty is accredited by the AMC for the medical profession and the Australian Dental Council, the accreditation authority for the dental profession.

The Board approved the accredited Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery training program and continuing professional development program of the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons as providing

a qualification for the purposes of specialist registration in the medical profession. Approval of the qualification is until 31 December 2016.

Review of the specialist assessment pathway

A nationally uniform assessment process for International Medical Graduates (IMGs) was implemented from 1 July 2008. This was an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments and resulted in the establishment of three nationally consistent assessment pathways for IMGs. These are:

- Competent authority pathway
- Standard pathway
- Specialist pathway

All IMGs who apply for limited registration for postgraduate training or supervised practice or limited registration for area of need are required to fulfill the requirements of one of the pathways.

Broadly, the specialist pathway is available to specialists who qualified outside of Australia. There are two types of assessment:

1. Comparability assessment – The IMG's qualifications, training and experience are assessed against those of an Australian qualified specialist. The specialist medical college can assess the IMG as being substantially comparable, partially comparable or not comparable
2. Area of need assessment – If a specialist IMG is applying to work in an area of need, the specialist college will assess whether the IMG is able to meet the service requirements for that particular position. Some colleges conduct a comparability assessment at the time that they assess for suitability to practise in a specific position in an area of need.

Specialist assessment involves a number of agencies. In brief:

1. IMGs initially apply for specialist assessment via the AMC. The AMC acts as a clearing house for primary source verification of documents and ensures all documentation is complete
2. Once the documentation is complete, the AMC sends the documentation to the relevant college which assesses the IMG and provides advice to the AMC
3. After the IMG has been assessed, he/she can apply to the Board for registration.

Detailed information about the requirements of the specialist pathway can be found on the AMC website at www.amc.org.au.

The specialist pathway was established at a time when there were eight separate state and territory Boards. With the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme in place, there is an opportunity to streamline processes, reduce duplication and increase clarity.

The Board's National Specialist IMG Committee (NSIMGC) has reviewed the specialist pathway and has proposed changes. In reviewing the pathway, the NSIMGC also looked to the recommendations made in the report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing on the inquiry into the registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors.

The proposed changes to the specialist pathway aim to maximise clarity, minimise duplication and ensure that terminology used is current.

The key changes proposed by the NSIMGC include:

- To remove the need for checking of the documentation by the AMC before submission to the relevant specialist medical college. The practitioner will have a more direct relationship with the college, rather than communicating through the AMC
- To use a portal so that agencies involved in progressing an application can communicate more effectively

- To streamline the definitions of comparability with the goal of emphasising the key differences between an IMG who has been assessed as either “substantially comparable”, “partially comparable” or “non-comparable”.

The Board will consult on the proposed changes to the specialist pathway with specialist colleges in the first instance and later will consult more widely.

Approval of registration standards

The Board was pleased to note that the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council approved the following registration standards:

1. Granting general registration as a medical practitioner to Australian and New Zealand medical graduates on completion of intern training and
2. Endorsement of registration for acupuncture for registered medical practitioners

The registration standards are published on the Board’s website at www.medicalboard.gov.au under “Registration Standards”.

Dr Joanna Flynn AM
Chair, Medical Board of Australia

21 December 2012