

Medical Board of Australia consultation on the funding of external doctors' health programs

Submission received from: **Medical School of the University of Melbourne**

Question 1: Is there a need for health programs?

Do you see any value in, or need for external health programs for medical students and/or doctors? Please explain your reasoning

Yes we consider that such programs are essential.

Doctors and Medical students require medical care and support and are often reluctant to accept help as this may make them seem to be "failing" or "unable to cope with the pressures of the job". There is some evidence that doctors and medical students are under greater stress than their colleagues in other professions, though this may be related to their requirements for perfection.

External health programs can provide the appropriate level of diagnosis and management of the medical and psychological problems of their medical clients while assuring the doctors and students of anonymity, which is often a major concern.

Question 2: Preferred model for external health programs

Of the existing models in Australia as described above, is there a model that you would prefer to see adopted nationally? Is there an alternative model that you would like to see adopted nationally?

The model provided by VDHP is well known to us and provides a great service to the medical students and trainee doctors who have been referred or encouraged to attend.

The only minor drawback is that the psychiatrists to whom students are referred by VDHP do not usually bulk bill which can be a disincentive for continuing attendance by students. This can be a particular issue for students who depend on their family for health care funding and who judge that their family will be unwilling to pay for psychiatry support. These students may be international fee paying but may also be local.

Question 3: The role of the Board in funding external health programs

Do you believe that it is the role of the Board to fund external health programs?

Yes we do. The other possible funding sources would be government, which would lead to suggestions of bias if other professions were not funded, or the Colleges or the Australian Medical Association. The AMA is very involved in doctors' health programs and should be encouraged to continue but as not all doctors belong to the AMA and there may be a concern that the funding is being provided by some members for all doctors. The Colleges would need to agree to this as a priority which may take some time and again not all doctors belong to a college so there would be the issue of some providing for all.

The Medical Board registers all medical students and doctors and is also responsible for ensuring that patients are provided with safe medical care, so it is in the interests of the Medical Board that there are services to care for doctors and medical students' health, as unwell doctors may be unsafe doctors.

Question 4: Range of services provided by doctors' health programs

What services should be provided by doctors' health programs. In addition to the ones you have selected, what other services (if any) should be provided by doctors' health programs?

Telephone advice available 24/7

Referral to expert practitioners for assessment and management

Develop and maintain a list of practitioners who are willing to treat colleagues

Education services for medical practitioners and medical students to raise awareness of health issues for the medical profession and to encourage practitioners and students to have a general practitioner

Programs to enhance the skills of medical practitioners who assess and manage the health of doctors

Case management and monitoring (including workplace monitoring) the progress of those who voluntarily enter into Case Management agreements (or similar) with the service

Follow up of all participants contacting or attending the service

Assistance in finding support for re-entry to work and rehabilitation

Research on doctors' health issues

Publication of resources – maintaining a website, newsletters, journal articles

Question 5: Funding

How much of an increase in registration fees is acceptable to you, to fund doctors' health services?

\$25 - \$40

Question 6: Other comments

Do you have any other comments or feedback about external health programs?

We have no other comments to make