

Fact sheet

Effective date: 1 October 2016

Information on returning to practice

Background

Medical practitioners may stop practising for a range of reasons. When they return to practice, they are required to comply with the Medical Board of Australia's (the Board) Recency of practice registration standard.

The Board's role is defined in the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as in force in each state and territory (the National Law) and includes protecting the public through the registration and regulation of medical practitioners. The Board must be satisfied that medical practitioners, who want to return to practice after an absence, have the competence to provide safe healthcare.

Medical practitioners who seek to return to practice must meet the requirements for registration defined in the National Law and must comply with the Board's registration standards. This paper supports the Board's registration standard for recency of practice and provides information on how to comply with the standard.

Scope

This information applies to medical practitioners who have not practised for more than one year and who wish to return to practice.

Procedure and requirements

A medical practitioner applying for registration must demonstrate that they are qualified, suitable and eligible for registration including that they:

1. are a suitable person for registration. That is, the practitioner does not have an impairment, a criminal history or professional disciplinary history that may impact or is relevant to their ability to practise
2. will meet the recency of practice registration standard
3. will meet the continuing professional development registration standard during the period of registration
4. will meet the professional indemnity insurance arrangements registration standard and
5. will meet any other registration standard or requirement of the Board.

When the Board considers an application for registration and where the applicant has been absent from practice for more than one year, the Board will take the following factors into consideration:

- the practitioner's registration and practice history
- the period(s) of absence and when the practitioner last practised
- years of experience prior to the absence from practice

- activities related to the practice of medicine undertaken since they last practised, including continuing professional development (CPD), education or professional contact undertaken during the absence
- the intended scope of practice, including the role and position proposed.

Requirements for medical practitioners who wish to return to practice

A medical practitioner who has two or more years clinical experience as a registered medical practitioner and is returning to practice, is required to complete the following requirements:

- if they have not practised for up to and including 12 months:
 - there are no additional requirements that have to be met before re-commencing practice
- if they have not practised for between 12 months and up to and including 36 months:
 - at a minimum, before re-commencing practice, they must complete the equivalent of one year's continuing professional development (CPD) activities, relevant to their intended scope of practice. The CPD activities must be designed to maintain and update their knowledge and clinical judgment, or
- if they have not practised for more than 36 months:
 - they are required to provide a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice to the Board for consideration and approval.

A medical practitioner who has less than two years clinical experience as a registered medical practitioner and is returning to practice and has not practised for more than 12 months, is required to commence work under supervision in a training position approved by the Board.

Plan for professional development and re-entry to practice

Medical practitioners who have previously had two or more years clinical experience prior to the absence and are returning to practice after an absence of 36 months or more are required to submit a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice for the Board's approval.

The purpose of the plan for professional development and re-entry to practice is to ensure that the practitioner is returning to safe practice with appropriate supports in place. This is for the safety of patients and the practitioner.

The plan for professional development and re-entry to practice will be different for each practitioner. It should be tailored to the practitioner's particular circumstances and their individual learning needs. It is therefore not appropriate for the Board to issue a standard re-entry plan with set tasks or supervision levels.

However, practitioners have requested assistance on how to develop a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice. This document provides a framework that a practitioner can use to guide them and provides information about the typical elements of a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice.

Assistance in developing a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice may be obtained from:

- specialist colleges
- prospective or past supervisors
- prospective employers
- colleagues and mentors.

The terms of a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice usually should be negotiated with the prospective supervisor who is appropriately qualified in the area of intended practice. It should take into consideration:

1. the practitioner's specific learning needs, taking past education, experience and training into consideration, and
2. the requirements of the specific position that the practitioner is proposing to work in.

A plan for professional development and re-entry to practice should:

- define the terms of an agreement between a proposed supervisor and the practitioner
- state the previous scope of practice and the intended scope of practice (these may be the same)
- identify any gaps in knowledge and skills
- identify any training or education requirements, including programs run by the relevant college that will be undertaken to meet learning requirements
- articulate goals, expected outcomes and clear timeframes for achievement of goals
- propose the level of supervision, mentoring or peer review that may be required for a safe return to practice
- describe the orientation to the proposed employer's workplace
- allocate time for regular formal feedback or performance reviews by the proposed supervisor, any feedback or review should be recorded and signed by the supervisor and the practitioner
- provide the anticipated completion date for the re-entry to practice plan
- articulate the measures that will be put in place if the stated goals are not achieved in the stated timeframes
- include a written job offer on the organisation's letterhead which is signed and dated by an authorised person. The job offer should clearly indicate the intended field of practice, the position description and the type of employment (e.g. full-time/ part-time, employee/contractor etc).

If a practitioner does not have a proposed supervisor, they are still required to submit a re-entry plan based on their own self-assessment and the plan should include the relevant elements as outlined above.

To assist practitioners, the Board has developed a re-entry plan template which makes provision for the elements that should be included in a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice. The plan, with the exception of the 'Practitioner and supervisor agreement', may be modified or adapted to suit individual needs or substituted with a specialist medical college re-entry plan.

Changing your scope of practice

If a practitioner is changing their field or scope of practice, they may be required to undergo additional training to ensure they are competent in the new field or scope of practice.

The requirements are:

- if the change is to a subset of their current practice (that is, they are narrowing their scope of practice), there are no additional requirements
- if the change is an extension of their practice that their peers might reasonably expect from a practitioner in that field, they are required to undertake any training that peers would expect before taking up the new area of practice, or
- if the change is to a different field of practice, they will be required to consult with the relevant specialist college and develop a professional development plan for entering the new field of practice for the consideration and approval of the Board.

Practitioners returning from overseas practice

A practitioner who has been practising in a jurisdiction outside Australia will meet the recency of practice standard provided they:

- have not been absent from practice for a year or more, and
- are not intending to change their scope of practice.

Consideration of a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice

It is a professional responsibility for medical practitioners to work within their limits of competence. The Board expects that practitioners have the necessary level of insight to realise those limits of competence. A plan for professional development and re-entry to practice should demonstrate to the Board that the practitioner (with assistance from prospective employers and/or supervisors, if relevant) has assessed their level of competence and has assessed their learning needs and how to meet those learning needs. The plan for professional development and re-entry to practice should also demonstrate the structures that will be put in place, such as supervision, mentoring and regular feedback to ensure safe practice.

The Board may seek further information including seeking advice from the relevant specialist college, if it is not satisfied that the submitted plan for professional development and re-entry to practice provides sufficient information about the safeguards for returning to practice.

The Board may also decide to formalise the re-entry plan by imposing conditions on registration or accepting an undertaking from the practitioner.

The Board will require the practitioner's supervisor(s) or mentor(s) to confirm that the practitioner has complied with the plan for professional development and re-entry to practice. Before releasing the practitioner from the obligations of the plan, the Board may require that their supervisor confirms that the practitioner's practice is of a sufficient standard to satisfy the Board that they do not require the additional supports.

Auditing a practitioner's plan for professional development and re-entry to practice

The Board may audit compliance with the plan for professional development and re-entry to practice at any time.

Associated documents

1. Template – Plan for professional development and re-entry to practice
2. Recency of practice registration standard