



MEDICAL BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2007

Meet the Board

Dr Charles Kilburn	Chair
Mr David Gawler	Medical Practitioner
Ms Diane Walsh	Public Member
Dr Gary Lum	Medical Practitioner
Dr Len Notaras	Medical Practitioner
Dr Jennifer Delima	Medical Practitioner
Dr Meredith Arcus	Medical Practitioner
Mr Richard Bryson	Public Member

Board Support

Ms Jill Huck	Registrar
Ms Colette Pethick	Policy & Research
Ms Julie Burrows	Registrations
Ms Samantha Bullen	A/Complaints Mgr

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the first Newsletter for 2007. An exciting and challenging year is anticipated by the Board with continued increases in the number of conditional registrants undertaking working in Area of Need positions and ongoing progress towards the national registration and accreditation.

This and future Newsletters will provide ongoing feedback in relation to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), National Registration and Accreditation model.

COAG plans to commence the new arrangements for regulation and accreditation of 9 professional groups in July 2008. These health professions are as follows:

Medical Practitioners; Chiropractors; Dental (Dentists, Dental Specialists, Dental Hygienists, Dental Therapists, Prosthetists); Nurses & Midwives; Optometrists; Osteopaths; Pharmacists; Physiotherapists, and Psychologists. Some consideration is currently being given to the inclusion of other professions.

At this point in time it is projected that Occupational Therapists, Aboriginal Health Workers and Radiographers will continue to be regulated under current Northern Territory legislation.

The Chairs of the Northern Territory Boards listed above have forwarded a submission to COAG

Health Working Group and the NT Government. The Australian Medical Council, Joint Medical Boards Advisory Council and a number of specialist colleges have all forwarded submissions in relation to the proposed by COAG model.

Mr Abbott speech on Friday 16 February indicates the Commonwealth's support for a model that includes profession specific national Boards.

It is in your best interest to ensure you keep your annual practising certificates (APC) in a secure place and check it for the following:

- the date on which your APC expires;
- the accuracy of information on your APC.

Please contact the Board immediately if the details on your APC are incorrect.

The Board has been disappointed with the number of registrants who have allowed their registration to lapse and have practised unlicensed for a period. Should you find yourself in this situation, it is in the best interest of your clients, yourself and your employer to rectify the situation immediately.

The Board strongly encourages all medical practitioners to develop an understanding of the *Health Practitioners Act 2004* and hopes its Newsletters provide assistance in this area.

Please contact the Board if you have items of interest you would like the Board to address in Newsletters.

Best Wishes

Dr Charles Kilburn (Chair)

BOARD MEMBER VACANCY

On 11 May 2007 there will be a medical practitioner vacancy and a public member vacancy on the Board. Board membership is a rewarding experience and remuneration is available for non-government employees. Please refer to the attached notice calling for Expressions of Interest.

Policies and Guidelines

The following policies have been revised and are available on the Board's website:

- Entitlement to Registration Policy (re points of identification required).
- Competence Assessment Policy.

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2007

- Conflict of Interest Policy (Board and HPLA staff)

Scheduled Board Meeting Dates

Please note the Board requires supervision reports, applications for registration and other information to be addressed at a Board meeting, to be available no less than two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting date.

The Board cannot guarantee that documents received after this date will be addressed at the next scheduled meeting. Late documents will be assessed for the level of urgency. Should your matter be urgent please contact the Board at the address on this Newsletter.

Meeting dates currently scheduled for 2007:

5 February 12 March 30 April
18 June 20 August 10 December

National Issues

English Language Proficiency Policy

Medical Boards are revising the nationally agreed 'English Language Proficiency Policy'. The current policy applies to all overseas trained medical practitioners seeking registration in any Australian jurisdiction and is available on the Board's website.

International Medical Graduate Pre-registration Assessment Committee

A committee consisting of representatives from all Medical Boards, Commonwealth Government and jurisdictional governments have been developing a national model for pre-registration assessment of international medical graduates.

Competent Authorities Model

The Australian Medical Council, nominated representatives from all Medical Boards and Government representatives from all jurisdictions have been developing a model whereby international medical graduates, who trained in countries that are considered to provide comparable medical education and experience as that available in Australia can be registered to work in an Australian jurisdiction.

Information for Medical Practitioners and Employers re Practising Unlicensed

To hold a current registration in the Northern Territory is a legal requirement and the responsibility of the practitioner. Practising unlicensed is a breach of Section 101 (1)(b) of the *Health Practitioners Act*.

The Board alerts practitioners and employers to the fact that practising unlicensed may: affect indemnity arrangements; Medicare rebate

payments; cause professional embarrassment and the practitioner and employer to be in breach of the *Trade Practices Act 1974*.

The Board reminds practitioners it is their responsibility to ensure they hold a current practising certificate. Please note **your practising certificate expires on 30 September every year**. If you fail to renew your practising certificate by **30 September**, and continue to practise, you have committed an offence under the Act.

Renewal forms are posted to registrants by the end of August/September annually, forms will be available from this office or the Board's website. Please note non-receipt of a renewal notice is not an acceptable reason for practising unlicensed. It is important to note that non-receipt of a renewal notice is most often linked to the registrant's failure to notify the Board of a change of address.

Employers are reminded to ensure they have sound processes in place to ensure all medical practitioners and other regulated health profession employees hold current registration, at the time of commencing employment and by the renewal date each year.

Joint Medical Boards Advisory Council (JMBAC)

Delegates from Boards in each Australian jurisdiction attend JMBAC meetings approximately 4 times per year. The forums provide an opportunity to develop nationally consistent policies, identify opportunities for greater consistency between jurisdictions as legislation allows and to address issues related to regulation of medical practitioners of national importance such as the Council of Australian Governments national registration and accreditation proposal.

Key outcomes for JMBAC during 2006 and early 2007 include:

- Review of the National English Language Proficiency Policy;
- Agreement to the introduction of a National Validation of Primary Source Documents;
- Agreement to introduction of a National Certificate of Registration Policy;
- Continued contribution to the COAG model of national registration and national accreditation;

Know your Act

Medical practitioners and 11 other health profession groups are regulated under the *Health Practitioners Act 2004* in the Northern Territory. The purpose of the Act is to ensure public protection.

The following information is provided to emphasise the need to ensure your Annual Practising Certificate is current, correct and

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2007

secure. In addition information in relation to Offences of dishonesty has been provided.

S40 (2) Practising certificates

A practising certificate issued to a registered health practitioner is evidence until the due date, or the date determined by the relevant Board, that –

- (a) the health practitioner is authorised to practise in the Territory in the category of registration specified in the certificate subject to the conditions, if any, specified in the certificate;
- (b) the health practitioner is authorised to practise in the restricted practice areas, if any, subject to the conditions, if any, specified in the certificate; or

S41 Replacement and amendment of certificates

(1) If the relevant Board is satisfied that a certificate issued by it has been lost or destroyed, it may issue a replacement certificate (that is marked accordingly) on the replacement certificate fee being paid.

(2) The relevant Board, by notice, may require a health practitioner to surrender a certificate issued to the health practitioner to enable it to issue a new certificate with amended particulars.

(3) The Registrar of a Board has the same powers in relation to an interim certificate of registration or enrolment as the Board has under this section in relation to certificates issued by it.

(4) A health practitioner who is given a notice under subsection (2) must surrender the certificate to the relevant Board –

- (a) within 7 days after receiving the notice; or
- (b) within any longer period that the Board allows and specifies in the notice.

(5) A person who is given a notice by a Registrar under subsection (3) must surrender his or her interim certificate to the Registrar –

- (a) within 7 days after receiving the notice; or
- (b) within any longer period that the Registrar allows and specifies in the notice.

Penalty: 50 penalty units.

42. Offences in relation to certificates

A person who is issued with a certificate of registration must not –

- (d) lend or agree to lend that certificate to another person; or
- (e) allow that certificate to be used by another person.

Penalty: 500 penalty units.

106. Offences of dishonesty

(1) A person must not make or produce a false or misleading statement, either orally or in writing, in connection with –

- (a) an application, assessment or inquiry;
- (b) a preliminary investigation into a complaint; or
- (c) an investigation carried out by an inspector.

(2) A person must not forge or change –

- (a) a certificate of registration or enrolment;
- (b) an interim certificate of registration or enrolment; or
- (c) a practising certificate.

(3) A person must not forge or change a degree, diploma or other evidence of qualifications for registration or enrolment under this Act.

(4) An offence against this section is a regulatory offence.

Section 46

Notice of change of name or address

A health practitioner must, within 30 days of changing his or her name, personal address or business address, give the relevant Board notice of the change and the new name or address, as the case may be.

Failing to update the Board with changes of name / address details means that you will not receive any correspondence from the Board. In effect this means you will miss the opportunity:

- To keep up with changes to policy;
- Receive newsletters, and
- Receive the application to renew your registration.

The Board seeks your assistance in ensuring that the name and contact details maintained on the database are current.

Osteonecrosis of the Jaws (ONJ) and Adynamic Bone Disease

Australian Drug Evaluation Committee (ADEC) reports that evidence is showing that it is increasingly likely that use of bisphosphonates can increase the risks of osteonecrosis of the jaws and adynamic bone disease.

Prevention is of the utmost importance. Therapy should only be initiated if individual risk versus benefit assessment is thought to be favourable. Patients being considered for bisphosphonate treatment should be:

- Informed of the symptoms of ONJ;
- Advised to seek a dental assessment and treatment before commencing bisphosphonate treatment; and
- Advised of the importance of informing their dentist they are taking these medicines before any dental treatment is carried out.

It is important that health professionals are aware of the presenting clinical features of this condition,

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2007

as the onset can be from months to years after commencing bisphosphonate therapy.

The features include the following:

- Altered local sensation (hyperaesthesia or numbness)
- Maxillofacial pain (toothache)
- Denture 'sore spots'
- Loose teeth
- Exposed bone in the cavity
- Marked oral odour

Prescribing Alert – Pseudoephedrine

Pseudoephedrine is a precursor in the illicit manufacture of methylamphetamine. One pack of pseudoephedrine product retailing for \$15 may generate thousands of dollars on the illegal market. Traffickers ('pseudo runners') have sourced pseudoephedrine products from pharmacies for several years. Now, as cooperative actions and regulatory controls on accessibility to pharmacy OTC products start to 'bite', pseudo runners are targeting doctors as unwitting sources of pseudoephedrine products, especially for prescription only quantities of higher dose products such as Sudafed, Telfast Decongestant, Demazin, Codral Cold and Flu and Clarinase. Pseudo runners take pains to present as plausible and unremarkable clients.

Doctors are encouraged to take extra care to establish therapeutic need, to consider prescribing an alternative drug if they cannot verify the patient identity and store all prescription stationary out of sight of the patient.

If you have any suspicions about a person requesting a pseudoephedrine product, please call CrimeStoppers on 1800 333 000.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.vic.crimestoppers.com.au/articleZone.aspx?articleZoneID=138>

Conduct Tribunals

One matter before the Medical Practitioners Appeals Tribunal was finalised on 07 November 2005. The Tribunal imposed the same conditions as the Board imposed in 2003 to protect the public following proven misconduct.

The Board notified other medical boards in Australia and New Zealand and the General Medical Council (GMC) in the UK. The GMC has referred the information to a *Fitness to Practise Panel* for determination in August 2006, based on documents provided by the Board.

The second matter before the **Health**

Professional Review Tribunal established pursuant to section 63 of the *Health Practitioners Act 2004* was part heard from February 2006. The practitioner withdrew the appeal to the Tribunal in June 2006. Therefore, the Tribunal has dismissed this matter and the conditions imposed on the practitioner's registration by the Board have been retained.

Impairment

As at 31 March 2007, there were two matters of possible impairment under investigation pursuant to Part 5 of the Act.

The Board is monitoring five medical practitioners with conditions or undertakings imposed to assist the rehabilitation of the practitioner whilst protecting the public.

Performance Assessment

There are no current investigations of possible unsatisfactory professional performance pursuant to Part 6 of the Act.

Competence Assessment

The Board has engaged experts in the same field of practice as the medical practitioner undertaking the assessment to conduct one competence assessment in the preceding 6 months.

Registration Statistics

As at close of business 31 March 2007 there was a total of **1478** medical practitioners registered to practise in the Northern Territory. Of these there are:

1123 Full Registration
261 Conditional Registrations of whom:
149 doctors have been issued with Conditional Registrations to practise in an area of need of whom:

- 71 practise in the Darwin area
- 7 practise in Katherine area
- 50 practise in Alice Springs/Barkley area
- 3 practise in Gove
- 18 are in the General Practice arena.

Contact details

Medical Board of the Northern Territory
GPO Box 4221
DARWIN
NT 0801

Telephone +61 8 8999 4157

Fax +61 8 8999 4196

Email healthprofessions.ths@nt.gov.au

Web: www.nt.gov.au/health/registrationboards