

Consultation on the recognition of Genetic Pathology by The Human Genetics Society of Australasia

The HGSA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the application for recognition of a new field of specialty practice: Genetic Pathology. The Human Genetics Society of Australasia was formed in 1977 to provide a forum for the various disciplines collected under the title of Human Genetics. Our members include clinical geneticists, pathologists, laboratory scientists and genetic counsellors.

The HGSA strongly supports the application by the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia to recognise Genetic Pathology as a new field of specialty practice. Genetics and genomics is a rapidly advancing and complex field of diagnostic pathology which requires specialist training and appropriate continuous professional development.

Changes to Requirements for the Supervision in the Clinical Governance of Medical Pathology Laboratories (Sixth Edition 2021), enshrined the requirement for supervision of testing by a Pathologist within their Scope of Practice. For genetics and genomics, this training in Genetic Pathology is provided by the RCPA and supported by many HGSA members. Laboratories offering a full range of testing must be supervised by a Pathologist with RCPA training in Genetic Pathology.

Some Pathologists who have undertaken additional training in genetic technologies, but not the full RCPA specialised program in Genetic Pathology supervise a limited range of low complexity tests in laboratories that are not primarily concerned with genetic testing. This remains appropriate and there will continue to be Pathologists with skills in the other disciplines and no significant fragmentation of health care knowledge and skills.

Although there is this requirement for specialised training, medical practitioners with the RCPA qualification in Genetic Pathology cannot register this on their record on the Register of Specialists. Thus, the title “Specialist Genetic Pathologist” is not subject to the protections afforded by recognition as a field of specialty practice.

We support the RCPA claim that approval of Genetic Pathology for the purposes of specialist registration will ensure visibility of the current workforce and may incentivise more medical practitioners to take up training in Genetic Pathology. The RCPA program of education in Genetic Pathology should become an AMC accredited program of study to support this. HGSA believes the increasing use of genetic and genomic testing in all fields of medicine will require increased numbers of pathologists with appropriate training.