

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met at the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) National office in Melbourne on Wednesday 15 August 2018.

The meeting was chaired by Julie Reeves from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

AHPRA update

AHPRA CEO, Martin Fletcher, updated members on various matters, including the following.

- AHPRA is looking at notifications research and data to see what can be done to make it easier for members of the community to get the right information and reach the right agency to address their concerns.
- There is a consistent increase in notifications which may suggest greater awareness of the National Scheme.
- AHPRA and Victoria Police have signed a memorandum of understanding, which details procedures for timely and appropriate information sharing, within our existing powers under the National Law, where AHPRA or Victoria Police discover certain information in the course of investigations.
- The Communique from the August COAG Health Council meeting indicated strong support from Ministers to focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety and training with AHPRA asked to provide further advice in options.
- Applications for registration as a paramedic will open on 3 September 2018. Ministers have not announced when national regulation for this profession will formally start, but it is expected to be late in 2018.

Regulatory operations update

AHPRA Executive Director, Regulatory Operations, Kym Ayscough, updated members on a number of matters, including the following.

- Changes to operational structures of AHPRA, including establishing a new structure for how clinical advice is given to National Boards, developing plain language information postcards to be included in letters for notifiers and practitioners on how the process works, establishing a national legal precedent database and a pilot program testing counselling as a notifications outcome (wider rollout will depend on outcome and evaluation of the pilot which is expected to take one year).
- Confirmation that there will continue to be a State or Territory Manager in every office who will be able to connect stakeholders with the most appropriate person to respond to any questions or issues (even when a specific piece of work is not being undertaken from that particular local office).
- The Medical Board of Australia has decided to publish links to disciplinary decisions by courts and tribunals on the public register of practitioners only when there has been an adverse finding against the doctor. Earlier this year, the Board decided to introduce links to all public tribunal decisions, in the interests of transparency and on the recommendation of the Chaperone Review.

Professional practice strategy

AHPRA Executive Director, Strategy and Policy, Chris Robertson, provided an update to members.

- Professional Practice Strategy is a risk-based and proportionate approach to regulation. It involves a four-level framework in characterising behaviour, appropriate intervention and processes involved in decision-making when managing practitioner registrations and notifications. It allows matters that are lower risk to be managed appropriately, and for higher risk matters to be considered in-depth. This approach has been developed with the insights gained since the National Scheme started in 2010.

- A further review of notification letters is underway, including consideration of behavioural insight techniques and how they might be useful to shape desired professional behaviour. Significant work is also occurring to establish a sustainable method of assessing regulatory risk.
- Members discussed possible questions, different thoughts on indicators in escalating behaviour and other tools which may be relevant to health practitioner regulation across all professions. Members discussed that every regulator grapples with quantifying risk and there is an opportunity to discuss the matter in greater detail and context.

Advertising and compliance

AHPRA National Director, Compliance, Jim O'Dempsey, provided an update to members.

- The advertising and compliance strategy is working well. It is clear that the vast majority of practitioners want to do the right thing and will change their advertising after receiving a letter from a National Board. In the rare case of ongoing non-compliant advertising, Boards can impose conditions on a health practitioner's registration.
- A pilot is running to test an audit approach to advertising compliance for the chiropractic and dental professions. At renewal, practitioners will be asked to make a declaration when applying for renewal of registration that they have complied with the advertising provisions of the National Law. Random audit will seek to confirm compliance. Audits will be conducted January to May 2019

Research framework

AHPRA National Director, Strategy and Research, Paul Shinkfield, presented to members.

- AHPRA and the National Boards have published a research framework to help identify priority areas for research and set guidelines in handling data access to improve regulation and patient safety. Paul Shinkfield shared data sources and walked the members through the webpage and how the public can submit a data request.
- Providing oversight for NRAS research activities is the Research Evaluation Committee (REC) which also gives advice and recommendations to the AHPRA National Executive on the strategic use of data and research to inform policy development. Paul Shinkfield also gave a brief overview of published research and upcoming research activities in 2019.
- Members discussed the research priorities.

Consultation on mandatory reporting

James Liddy from the Queensland Department of Health presented the proposed amendments to members.

- Members discussed the proposed amendments and provided feedback.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the PRG will be on 21 November 2018.

Julie Reeves

Chair

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