

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met at the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) National office in Melbourne on Wednesday 21 November 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.

- Tranche 1 amendments to the National Law¹ including:
 - confirmation of fifteen National Boards through the participation of the paramedicine profession and recognition of nursing and midwifery as two separate professions
 - the requirement for the national register of practitioners to append all names subject to a prohibition order, and
 - the Ministerial Council is empowered to make changes to the structure or operation of National Boards following consultation.
- The Tranche 1A amendments to the National Law which focuses on two areas including:
 - proposed amendments to mandatory reporting requirements for treating practitioners, and
 - increase of penalties for offences under the National Law (e.g. holding out).
- The Bill is before the Queensland Parliament and will be reviewed by the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee.
- The 2017/18 Annual Report was tabled in the Western Australian parliament on 1 November 2018 and has been publicly released. Noted in the report's highlights is the number of registered practitioners reaching over 700,000, an improvement in consumer access to public information, engagement with the community through a better notifications experience for practitioners and notifiers, customer service delivery, advertising compliance, continuing improvement work on the National Scheme² and strengthening international collaborations. The [2017/18 Annual Report](#) is now available on the AHPRA website.

Regulatory operations update

- AHPRA Executive Director, Regulatory Operations, Kym Ayscough, updated members on several matters, including the following. Work continues on designing of the future operating model for the Notifications Team. A Clinical Input Service (comprising professional advisors for the professions where they are employed) is currently being piloted. A national Intake and Assessment Team is being established and working with new decision-making models such as a National Assessment Committee for initial assessment of notifications about medical practitioners. Investigation team models are in the early stages of design but are likely to include Case management and Specialist Case management teams.
- Updates on some key initiatives highlighted include the selection and contracting of services for the staff wellbeing program and a few samples of notifications postcards which walks the reader through the notifications process from the perspective of both the practitioner and the concerned public.

¹ Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

² National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme).

- Paramedicine registration begins on 1 December 2018 with more than 14,000 applications received and being processed entirely online.
- The Graduate registration applications are open and online application is encouraged. The online application includes the ability to record and track employment commencement dates. In addition, features include a portal for education providers to submit qualification lists and Green ID primary source verification of identity documents where over 60% of documents are immediately verified, allowing for automatic request of the required criminal history check.
- In advertising compliance, the final 450 matters from the around 2,400 advertising complaints received in 2017 are on track to clear and become compliant with their advertising responsibilities by January 2019. An advertising compliance pilot audit chiropractors and dental practitioners will run from the November renewal period to May 2019. A sample declaration about advertising compliance has been added to the renewal application and this was shared with members.
- Members were interested to know further developments on how AHPRA is working with Whitecoat on advertising compliance with the National Law as it was discussed earlier this year.

Notification video series

AHPRA National Engagement Adviser Susan Biggar and Strategic Communications Designer Natasha Thorn discussed a 'Let's talk about it' video series under development and sought member views.

- Members were generally in agreement with the content and delivery of the initial three pilot videos presented for their feedback.
- Helpful suggestions from the group included more emphasis on clinical adviser involvement in the management of notifications from the beginning, to acknowledge that the notification process is 'stressful' but no need to keep repeating this, to test videos with practitioners, including, feedback from practitioners with notifications, and add an option for practitioners to 'contact their professional organisations.'
- Future progress on this work to improve the notifier and practitioner experience will be shared with members.

Accreditation arrangements update

AHPRA Executive Director, Strategy and Policy, Chris Robertson, National Director, Policy and Accreditation, Helen Townley and Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum (HPACF) Deputy Chair Michael Shobbrook shared the following.

- The [Consultation Report on the review of accreditation arrangements](#) is published on the AHPRA website. This report identifies next steps for critical work such as the new accreditation agreements and terms of reference, principles for accreditation funding and fees, and development of key performance indicators for reporting. AHPRA and the National Boards are refining materials and having individual discussions with professions to finalise data for consideration by the AManC in December 2018.
- Mr Shobbrook announced that the Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum (HPACF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) which allows both parties to share information on best practice and, improve efficiency of accreditation to ensure public safety.

Social research update

Mr Robertson provided an update to members.

- An overview was given of the methodology, range and breakdown of stakeholders consulted and key insights as part of the social research project. The project gathered stakeholder, practitioner and consumer perceptions of AHPRA and the National Boards. Insights included:

- AHPRA and the National Boards are widely respected.
 - There is a need for a shared vision and more unified 'public face'.
 - Time to shift conversation from 'punitive' to 'positive'.
- Areas for further action included the need for AHPRA to be more accessible, improving perceptions with a more supportive approach, refreshing the visual brand including consideration of how to include the paramedicine profession and to simplify, be more proactive and positive with messages, being consistent with unified voices between AHPRA and the National Boards in building and supporting public confidence in regulation.
 - Members exchanged views about the National Boards' results on trust and suggested a number of things would be important to consider including that concerted efforts would be required to change perception and identify different ways of engaging with practitioners.
 - Members pointed out that ethics considerations and data privacy were relevant factors to include in determining how sensitive data in the study will be further used and shared.

Professional practice strategy

Mr Robertson, provided an update to members.

- AHPRA is open to working with practitioners to ensure that protective measures are defined and they know who to approach in addressing issues or concerns.
- Members were briefed on the risk assessment approach which would enable overall regulatory functions with adequate support and application for decisive action. For instance, in Notifications, identifying a more detailed definition of low, medium and high-risk behaviours that will need more staff education on the appropriate response.
- Important questions were raised by the members about clinical governance, what makes processes unsafe and what opportunities there might be to work with the safety and healthcare community as part of this strategy.

Other business

Ms Reeves was voted by members to renew her role as Chair of the Professions Reference Group for the 2019 term.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the PRG will be on 20 March 2019.

Julie Reeves

Chair

Professions Reference Group