

# Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met at the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) National office in Melbourne on Wednesday 22 May 2019.

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.

- The second webinar of the Western Pacific Regional Collaborative Network of Health Workforce Regulators (the network) took place. Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough gave an introductory briefing on the work of the Council for Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR) and approaches to effective public registers in health practitioner regulation were discussed.
- AHPRA continues to monitor issues arising from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Apart from the preliminary briefing provided to the Commission on how the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme works, AHPRA and the National Boards have not been asked to make further submissions at this stage.

We have met with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining our roles and responsibilities and information flows between the Commission, AHPRA and National Boards.

Engagement with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Commission is also progressing with Commissioner Graeme Head sharing his insights with AHPRA into future collaboration, including clarifying roles and responsibilities. AHPRA is in early stage discussions with the Commission with a workshop planned for later in 2019.

- Ministers have previously agreed to implement the National Code of Conduct (the Code) for unregistered health workers, with the intention for the Code to be nationally consistent. This means if an action is taken in any jurisdiction, it would then apply nationally. The Code is administered by health complaints entities (HCE) in each state and territory. There are challenges, particularly when the Code it is not yet completely rolled out, with several state and territories having still to pass the legislation.
- Safer Care Victoria has begun its public consultations on the independent review of evidence in relation to the practice of spinal manipulation on children under 12 years old. The review is looking at evidence through a systematic review and inviting the community and professions for feedback.
- The next meeting of the panel towards end of July will review all preliminary responses from the public consultations while the Cochrane Collaborating Centre will conduct a systematic review of the evidence base. It is expected that the report will be considered by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council later in 2019.

## Regulatory operations update

AHPRA Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough provided an update to members.

- Since the Tranche 1a legislative amendments were passed a few months ago AHPRA has taken measures to ensure that all arrangements for prosecuting statutory offences as indictable offences are in place when these take effect from 1 July 2019. This has included liaison with the Directors of Public Prosecution (DPP) in each state and territory. Subsequent changes in how AHPRA will manage these offences will be announced in July.

High-profile offence cases provide the public with the education and awareness of what conduct constitutes a statutory offence, whether from an individual or corporate body in holding out or

unlawfully using a protected title. Support from PRG members in disseminating such news items will be welcome.

- In notifications, there has been a fifteen percent increase year-to-date in the number of new notifications received around the country. Teams have closed more cases this year, compared to the same time last year. It is challenging to keep pace with this ongoing sharp increase, and it puts a pressure on assessment timeframes, despite our closure numbers being well ahead of last year. There appears to be no difference in the risk profile from previous years.
- Members discussed the changes in offence complaints and the reasons for the increase in notifications.

### **Graduate registration campaign**

AHPRA National Director, Registration Catherine Miedecke provided the following updates.

- As part of the changes to regulatory operations operating model, registration applications are now managed according to the nature of the application rather than the location in which the application arose. They are distributed across the following streams:
  - express
  - international, and
  - case management, for matters which require a more detailed assessment, for example, adverse disclosures.
- The impact of these changes meant some delays during the graduate registration period. Refinements are being made to improve the services provided for applicants including improved communications and a new administrative complaints function.
- Important areas to focus on in future will be managing expectations of new graduates for timeframes (given AHPRA cannot complete applications until confirmation of graduation is provided by educational institutions), working closely with the AHPRA customer service team (CST) to respond to queries and improving written communication, including utilising social media for disseminating information among the millennial generation of new graduates.
- Members and AHPRA staff agreed that it is a shared goal to get applicants registered as quickly as possible and exchanged information about recurring issues with applicants, employers and educational institutions as well as explored practical solutions which may be beneficial in engaging with stakeholders.
- Mr Fletcher reminded members that AHPRA's standard resource materials on how the registration process works are available on the website and can be shared or integrated with members' own outreach initiatives.

### **Professional practice strategy update**

AHPRA Executive Director, Strategy and Policy Chris Robertson and National Director, Policy and Accreditation Helen Townley shared information and discussed with members.

- In a recent workshop by the Council of Medical Colleges, Gerald B. Hickson, MD presented a 20-year study on *The Pursuit of Professional Accountability* where he introduces a direct evidence on the effect of a basic team respect model on patient safety.
- Federation of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture Societies Association's (FCMA) Grace Tham raised a congruent ethnographic study in 1961 by Howard Becker et. al., on how caring medical students

became socialised and noted that change must also be dealt with at the university level to ensure respect and role modelling is picked up early on in their careers.

- Members discussed challenges and ideas for best practice of professional practice, and professional elements, such as respectful peer-to-peer review and feedback, managing conflict, developing courage and resilience, and the need to strengthen teaching and leadership to create a cultural shift across the health system.

### **Mandatory reporting campaign**

AHPRA National Director, Government Relations Nick Lord updated members on the progress of preparation for changes to mandatory notification requirements.

- Members who expressed their interest to be part of the working group met on 24 April 2019 to discuss and provide feedback on key messages and strategies on how to implement the awareness campaign effectively on mandatory reporting. They looked at issues surrounding the revision of the National Board guidelines and preparation for the awareness campaign resources including case studies and information for practitioners and treating practitioners as well as employers, and universities. Once finalised this will be shared with the larger group for feedback.
- Preliminary consultation will begin soon followed by the initial confidential phase proceeding to the public consultations.
- The working group will meet next on 19 June 2019.

### **Cosmetic procedures: Consumer focused information**

AHPRA National Director, Policy and Accreditation Helen Townley and Strategic Policy Coordinator Luisa Interligi informed members of the following.

- There has been a significant amount of media attention lately on safety, consumer expectations and other issues relating to cosmetic procedures. AHPRA is currently looking into what else we can do to raise consumer awareness.

### **Advertising tools and resources**

Members were informed of the following.

- New information on the use of titles in advertising has been published on the AHPRA website to guide practitioners when advertising their health services. It aims to clarify areas including misleading titles and common errors particularly on descriptors.
- The next advertising resource being developed is about evidence, which will be published within the year. It will include guidance on what is acceptable and reliable evidence people can rely on for advertising. AHPRA is working to make these resources as accessible as possible to practitioners and professional associations.
- Members were interested to know if advertising tools and resources were available in other languages and how much traffic or views the pages generate.

### **Consultation on cultural safety**

AHPRA National Director, Communications Anita Rivera and Program Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Jayde Fuller provided an update.

- AHPRA, the National Boards and Accreditation Authorities in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme have partnered with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leaders and the National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF) in a public consultation released in April this year. The public consultation is seeking feedback on a proposed definition of 'cultural safety' to develop an agreed, national baseline definition that can be used as a foundation for embedding cultural safety across all functions in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme and for use by the NHLF.
- There are currently over 120 submissions. The final definition of 'cultural safety' is expected to be finalised by the end of July and applied across the National Scheme within the year. This includes the opportunity for using the final, agreed definition in documents such as future shared Codes of conduct for the professions regulated in the National Scheme and/or registration standards and guidelines.
- The cultural safety training program for all AHPRA employees is being developed for rollout by September this year.
- Members conveyed support of AHPRA's initiatives and welcomed opportunities for engagement and partnerships.

### **Changes to the administrative complaints process**

AHPRA National Complaints Manager Amanda Watson informed the members.

- Members were provided with an overview of changes on how administrative complaints are managed including a new *Administrative Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure* and a National Complaints Team dedicated to managing complex complaints, ensure effectiveness of the complaints system and learn from issues identified in complaints. The new policy and procedure include a clearly defined purpose for accepting complaints, a set of principles in action, more avenues for people to raise complaints, a clear escalation process and improved timeframes.

### **Other business**

- The FCMA raised issues in relation to dry needling performed by practitioners other than registered acupuncturists. These concerns were noted although are not within the scope of the PRG.
- Members were informed that the accreditation systems review is still being considered by governments.

### **Next meeting**

The next meeting of the PRG will be on 21 August 2019.

### **Julie Reeves**

Chair  
Professions Reference Group