

Communiqué: Chinese Medicine Reference Group

The fifth meeting of the Chinese Medicine Reference Group (the Reference Group) of the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (CMBA) was held virtually on 28 October 2020.

In attendance were:

- Board Members:
 - Distinguished Professor Charlie C. Xue, Chair CMBA and Chair of the Reference Group
 - Ms Bing Tian, CMBA practitioner member, ACT
 - Ms Stephanie Campbell, CMBA community member, NSW
- Ahpra Representative
 - Jill Humphreys, Acting Executive Officer, Chinese medicine, Ahpra
- Observers
 - Dr David Graham CMBA Deputy Chair and community member, ACT
 - Ms Christine Berle, CMBA practitioner member, NSW
 - Mr David Brereton, CMBA community member, Tas
 - Dr Liang Zhong Chen, CMBA practitioner member, SA
 - Dr Di Wen Lai, CMBA practitioner member, WA
 - Mr Roderick Martin, CMBA practitioner member, Qld
- Reference Group Members:
 - Dr Kevin Ryan, individual practitioner member
 - Ms Laura Sutton, new graduate practitioner member
 - Ms Dina Tsiopelas, individual practitioner member
 - Ms Honglin (Linda) Yang, individual practitioner member
 - Dr Shengxi (George) Zhang, individual practitioner member
 - Ms Sophy Athan, Member of the Ahpra Community Reference Group (CRG) - Community representative
 - Ms Tricia Greenway, community representative
 - Dr Cheryl McRae from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)
 - Ms Meryl Clarke from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)
 - Mr Peter Berryman from the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS)
 - Ms Kaitlin Edin from the Australian Natural Therapists Association (ANTA)
 - Ms Waveny Holland from the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association (AACMA)
 - Dr Max Ma from the Chinese Medicine Industry Council of Australia (CMIC)
 - Ms Donna Chew from the Federation of Chinese Medicine & Acupuncture Societies of Australia (FCMA)
 - Assoc Prof Xiaoshu Zhu, education provider representative (from 11am)
 - Dr Greg Cope, education provider representative

Acknowledgement of country

Dr Graham acknowledged the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this meeting took place and paid respect to Elders past and present.

Chair of the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia, Professor Charlie Xue

The Chair welcomed everyone to the fifth meeting of the Chinese Medicine Reference Group.

The Chair conducted a review of the agenda for prioritisation of the discussion time, no additional/new agenda items were proposed. The Chair noted the Terms of Reference and the processes which apply to the Reference Group (details of membership and the Terms of Reference are available under the [About us](#) section on the Board's website).

The Chair invited declarations of interest and none were raised.

The Chair clarified that the presentations given at the meeting were not necessarily the views of the Board.

Prof Xue gave an update report including:

- the retirement of inaugural Board Executive Officer, Debra Gillick
- the scheduled refresh and renewal of CMBA members via the Australian Health Ministers' processes, including the completion of the maximum number of terms of the Chair position
- that there were three action items from the previous meeting to report, including updates from TGA re medical devices relevant to Chinese Medicine
- that the Board met with the professional associations in 16 April 2020 and the Board will continue to communicate through this useful channel
- the progress of the development of a regulatory exam which will include an MCQ and OSCE components, implementation of these exams delayed due to COVID-19
- that the Board's usual schedule of face-to-face roadshows was replaced by a webinar which attracted approximately 560 attendees, providing an example of an efficient way for the Board to share information, and noting that the transcript and slides from the webinar will be published on the [Board's website](#).
- that the Board has reduced registration [fees](#) for the 2021 registration year by 15%, noting that fees have not been increased since 2015, highlighting the responsible and sustainable use of registrant funds.

Discussion of experiences gained from the COVID-19 pandemic

Linda Yang provided a presentation on the major possible impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, including on the healthcare industry and the contribution of Chinese medicine.

Update from community members

Ms Sophy Athan, member of the [Ahpra Community Reference Group](#) (CRG) provided a verbal report, including information about:

- the CRG's recent work and its cross-professional community-focussed approach enabling effective community input into such groups as Ahpra's Forum of National Chairs
- the development of a framework for the identification and handling of vexatious notifications (complaints)
- progress of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme's (the Scheme's) strategic engagement priorities
- the development of profession-specific [Professional capabilities](#) across several professions, including Chinese medicine. The professional capabilities identify the knowledge, skills and professional attributes needed to safely and competently practise as an acupuncturist, and/or a Chinese herbal medicine practitioner and/or a Chinese herbal dispenser in Australia. They describe the threshold level of professional capability required for both initial and continuing registration as a regulated health professional
- discussion held by the CRG on the community impact of COVID-19 and the CRG's ability to ensure community input into regulatory frameworks to deal with COVID-19 impacts.

Information from the Therapeutic Goods Administration

Dr Cheryl McRae, Assistant Secretary, Complementary & Over the Counter Medicines Branch, TGA

Dr McRae commenced her update by responding to a question raised at the October 2019 meeting of this group regarding the TGA's consideration of traditional methods versus modern manufacturing methods of therapeutic product preparations, including TGA input into the World Health Organisation's work to improve the quality and safety of traditional Chinese medicine. Whilst noting the slow nature of the development of an ISO Standard, it is considered that when Standards Australia develops a standard, it will solve the method of preparation issue around traditional Chinese medicine.

Dr McRae also touched on the recent determination to declare to the TGA certain sports supplements for which a declaration was not previously required and that all such information is available on the [TGA website](#), including recalled products and registered devices.

In answer to a question about a possible information-sharing arrangement between Ahpra and the TGA, particularly about forthcoming product recalls, Dr McRae explained the difficulties in pre-empting recalls, particularly from a process point of view and agreed to keep the CMBA on the circulation list.

Dr McRae then introduced her colleague Meryl Clarke, Head of the TGA Medical Devices Authorisation Branch, who gave a very informative presentation on medical devices and the TGA regulation of Chinese medicine (all based on intention of use for human beings), including:

- What is a Medical Device?
- Examples of Medical Devices
- Kinds of Medical Devices
- Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG)
- Medical Device ARTG Inclusion Process
- Traditional Chinese Medicine Medical Devices on the ARTG
- Regulation of Chinese Medicine

Members understood that there are currently 61 traditional Chinese medicine devices registered with the TGA, in addition to non-specific items such as heat lamps.

Information from the CMBA and Ahpra

Dr David Graham provided an update on:

- the progress towards public consultation of draft revised *Guidelines for safe Chinese herbal medicine practice* and *Infection prevention and control guidelines for acupuncture practice*.
 - preliminary consultation has closed and public consultation is expected to commence before the end of 2020
- the review and refresh of the Board's website and frequently asked questions. Members were invited to forward any feedback to chinesemedicineconsultation@ahpra.gov.au.
- the shared (across 11 regulated health professions) *Code of Conduct* (the Code) which has been revised and is nearly ready for preliminary consultation. Importantly, the Code now includes an agreed definition of [cultural safety](#). Practitioners are held accountable to the Board's Code of conduct if and when a complaint about their conduct or health is made
- the third iteration of a social research survey, expected to be published soon, seeking input on the levels of trust with health practitioner regulatory system, Ahpra and National Boards.

Mr David Brereton provided the following update:

- the updated [Advertising guidelines](#) from National Boards are now published, reviewed for clarity, noting that the requirements are the same for all advertisers including registered health practitioners. Ahpra works with advertisers and takes an educative approach to statutory offences such as advertising offences with the baseline consideration being the safety of the public.

Practitioner and professional associations item

Members discussed the emergence of the widespread of telehealth (virtual practice) across several health professions since the COVID-19 pandemic and that:

- private health funds have excluded Chinese medicine practitioners from being able to seek rebates from them
- there can be other barriers (e.g. poor lighting, internet) to conducting telehealth consultations
- many Chinese medicine practitioners have decided not to use telehealth in their chosen scope of practice.

Educators and new graduate member

David Graham opened the discussion by noting that the Board and Ahpra presented virtually to graduating cohorts of students from each of the Board's Approved programs of study in the past month each of which incorporated useful interactive dialogue and questions. He sought advice from members about how best

to engage students and invited educators to contact Lesley.haver@ahpra.gov.au if they wished to schedule a presentation and interactive student session.

Educator representatives generally agreed that there had been challenges in 2020 with clinical placements due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The Chair noted that Ahpra is aware of the challenges to approved programs of study and the institutions providing those programs of study and noted that the accreditation requirements are flexible and are outcomes focussed to ensure competency for safe practice. Educators with concerns or seeking clarification about accreditation requirements should contact Ahpra's [Program Accreditation Team](#).

Members were referred to the [Responding to COVID-19](#) webpage from Ahpra and National Boards which includes FAQs, including guidance about the use of telehealth and clinical education.

The Reference Group new graduate member, Laura Sutton, acknowledged that the issues for her as a new graduate have passed and noted that having a presentation from Ahpra and the Board prior to graduation would have been very useful.

Laura also highlighted the value of mentorship programs available through the associations. There were also contributions from our Consumer representatives about the roles of consumers in health profession development. Both Sophy and Patricia were happy to be contacted by other stakeholders to contribute to future activities related to Chinese medicine development.

Industry update

Members noted a presentation by Max Ma on the (voluntary) Wholesalers' code of practice for herbal products for supply to Chinese medicine practitioners and it was confirmed that it was not possible for the Board to enforce adherence, or signatories, to this document.

In closing, members expressed their appreciation and thanks to Dist Professor Xue for his stewardship not only to this group but also his service and dedication to the Chinese medicine profession through regulation and education over many, many years.

Dist Professor Charlie C Xue
Chair, Chinese Medicine Board of Australia

October 2020