Medical Board of Australia consultation on the funding of external doctors' health programs

Submission received from: The Medical Insurance Group (MIGA)

Question 1: Is there a need for health programs?

Do you see any value in, or need for external health programs for medical students and/or doctors? Please explain your reasoning

MIGA acknowledges and supports the need for external health programs for medical students and doctors.

The value of health programs is the direct benefit of providing independent, profession controlled organizations which aim to achieve a healthier profession and healthier community.

As seen by the matters that come before the Medical Board and involve doctors' health many doctors do not have their own general practitioner.

The opportunity for all medical students and doctors to access general practitioners for general health care, both physical and mental, in an anonymous and non threatening environment is of huge value in terms of guiding doctors and medical students down the path of prevention rather than cure.

As an insurer improvement in medical students' and doctors' health minimizes client risk by:

• Reducing litigation against medical students and doctors.

• Subjecting medical students and doctors to fewer disciplinary proceedings.

Question 2: Preferred model for external health programs

Of the existing models in Australia as described above, is there a model that you would prefer to see adopted nationally? Is there an alternative model that you would like to see adopted nationally?

MIGA does not make general comment on the type of services medical students and doctors would prefer or that are already available to them. We submit that the services should be such that they encourage the prevention of medical conditions and not just a crisis management service once the student or doctor is in trouble.

To the extent that we identify the need to have health programs in place we believe the DHSA provides such a model. MIGA supports a framework which gives doctors somewhere to seek assistance in a confidential manner and allows access to a stable of providers educated in doctors health issues. Dr. Roger Sexton, the Medical Director of DHSA, is associated with MIGA as a Board Member. This has provided us with a good understanding of the dynamics of the DHSA.

Question 3: The role of the Board in funding external health programs

Do you believe that it is the role of the Board to fund external health programs?

We agree that Medical Practitioners and the community are better served if the roles of the Board and any independent health service are separate.

The issue of funding is a matter for the Medical Board and the profession.

Question 4: Range of services provided by doctors' health programs

What services should be provided by doctors' health programs. In addition to the ones you have selected, what other services (if any) should be provided by doctors' health programs?

Telephone advice available 24/7

Referral to expert practitioners for assessment and management

Develop and maintain a list of practitioners who are willing to treat colleagues

Education services for medical practitioners and medical students to raise awareness of health issues for the medical profession and to encourage practitioners and students to have a general practitioner

Programs to enhance the skills of medical practitioners who assess and manage the health of doctors

Case management and monitoring (including workplace monitoring) the progress of those who voluntarily enter into Case Management agreements (or similar) with the service

Follow up of all participants contacting or attending the service

Assistance in finding support for re-entry to work and rehabilitation

Research on doctors' health issues

Publication of resources – maintaining a website, newsletters, journal articles

Question 5: Funding

How much of an increase in registration fees is acceptable to you, to fund doctors' health services?

Nil

Question 6: Other comments

Do you have any other comments or feedback about external health programs?