

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

Submission received from: [Georgiana Antoce](#)

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

There is a lot of value, in my opinion, in acknowledging not only the humanity and its painful aspects (including poor health and impoverished self-care) in members of the medical profession, but also the extra strain on all of us stemming from the nature of our jobs. The difficulty lies in the fact that regulating bodies and boards, become punitive and threatening (i.e. mandatory reporting) rather than supportive towards doctors in need of help - making it difficult for individuals to seek help through existing structures...A supportive attitude and open discussion of the need for self-care and awareness of personal limitations in doctors during university and postgraduate training years is likely to normalise this aspect and create an atmosphere of trust inside the profession.

In essence, there is value, in my opinion, in programs that encourage recognition of vulnerability, clear pathways for help-seeking behaviours, supportive inputs and an approach focused on individual health needs and minimisation of stigma. These may be best answered through external health programs, independent of the Boards.

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?

Doctors Health SA / DHAS Qld

VDHP/

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?

In my opinion, it is the role of the Board to assist its members when in need. Funding of the external health programs through the Board might shift the focus of attention from protecting the public only - to protecting members of the medical profession as well/ it might modify the somewhat detached regulatory guidelines and introduce aspects of real life medical experience in decision making withing the Boards/ it might promote research and programs designed especially to look into the longitudinal health status of doctors in different fields or clinical settings...On the other side, there needs to be clarity in regards to misuses of data, confidentiality, co-operation and patwhways to address unethical behaviours.

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

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

Other services (please list)

Facilitation of leave arrangements in a supportive way

Research and introduction of programs aiming to reduce stigma, "break the silence", normalise the return to work and increase supports available in workplaces

Publication of data on doctors' health, introduction of a course in the medical school aimed to promote self-care

Creation of peer support groups - i.e. Balint groups - to assist emotional needs in a non-pathologising way and prevent burn out in medical practitioners

Question 5: Funding

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

\$25 - \$40

Question 6: Other comments

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

They need to exist, need to be promoted and need to be financially viable