

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

Submission received from: **Medical Education Unit, Princess Alexandra Hospital**

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

Yes. Doctors and medical students are an at risk group for stress-related illness, burnout, substance abuse problems and mental health issues. Despite this doctors can be reluctant to seek proper consultation and treatment and when they do seek help, doctors can prove to be challenging patients. External health programs provide ready access to advice, assistance and management of health issues by doctors who are keen and experienced in providing care to other doctors. External health programs provide a way for doctors to seek and receive help in a confidential and supportive environment enabling early intervention and support for doctors to continue to provide safe and valued care to patients.

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?

Adopting a national model would benefit the medical profession through the uniform provision of quality support services and equity of access to the variety of services provided by external health programs across Australia. We are in support of the VDHP model as a benchmark program due to the comprehensive services it provides targeted at addressing doctors health issues. In addition to advice and referral we feel education programs relating to doctor health and well-being and professional development and support for doctors providing care through an external health program should be part of the national model.

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?

Whilst it is not the direct role of the Board the funding of external health programs, it does relate to the Board's role in managing impairment in medical practitioners and students. We agree it is not in the interests of the profession and the public for the Board to directly provide an advisory and referral service for medical practitioners with health concerns. However ensuring the viability and quality of external health programs is in the best interests of the profession and the public as it enables early intervention and support, complementing the Board's role in management of impairment and in line with the boards rehabilitative model of managing poor health.

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

Follow up of all participants contacting or attending the service

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

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?

\$10 - \$25

Question 6: Other comments

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

Maintaining confidentiality is paramount, however a national system may enable the collection of de-identified data to support extent of doctor health issues.