



Communiqué

National Specialist IMG Committee Meeting: 20 June 2012

The National Specialist International Medical Graduate (IMG) Committee is established as a Committee of the Medical Board of Australia (the Board).

The Committee meets quarterly and publishes a report after each meeting.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing report of the inquiry into registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors: Lost in the Labyrinth

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing released a report on the inquiry into registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors in March 2012. The House of Representative report makes 45 recommendations, many of which require action from the Board and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and the specialist medical colleges.

The Board, AMC and the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) which represents the specialist medical colleges, established a working party to consider how to respond to the recommendations in the report. The Committee considered a report from the working party.

The Committee noted that the House of Representatives report contains many constructive recommendations. The AMC, specialist medical colleges and the Board and AHPRA have started reviewing processes for the assessment and registration of IMGs and look forward to working cooperatively to streamline processes and reduce unnecessary barriers while ensuring high standards of assessment as expected by the community.

Review of the specialist assessment pathway

A nationally uniform assessment process for IMGs was implemented from 1 July 2008. This was an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and resulted in the establishment of three nationally consistent assessment pathways for IMGs. These are:

- Competent authority pathway
- Standard pathway
- Specialist pathway

All IMGs who apply for limited registration for postgraduate training or supervised practice or limited registration for area of need are required to fulfill the requirements of one of the pathways.

This Committee provides advice and recommendations to the Board on the specialist pathway.

Broadly, the specialist pathway is available to specialists who are qualified outside of Australia. There are two types of assessment:

1. Comparability assessment – The IMG's qualifications, training and experience are assessed against those of a new Australian qualified specialist. The specialist College can assess the IMG as being substantially comparable, partially comparable or not comparable
2. Area of need assessment – If a specialist IMG is applying to work in an area of need, the specialist college will assess whether the IMG is able to meet the service requirements for

that particular position. Some Colleges also conduct a comparability assessment at the time that they assess for suitability to practise in a specific position in an area of need.

Specialist assessment involves a number of agencies. In brief:

1. IMGs initially apply for specialist assessment via the AMC. The AMC acts as a clearing house for primary source verification of documents
2. Once the documentation is complete, it is referred to the relevant college which assesses the IMG and provides advice to the AMC
3. After the IMG has been assessed, he/she can apply to the Board for registration.

Detailed information on the requirements of the specialist pathway can be found on the AMC website at www.amc.org.au.

The Committee mapped out the process of IMG assessment in the specialist pathway and noted that there are opportunities for the AMC, Board and AHPRA and the specialist medical colleges to work together to streamline and simplify the processes and make them more efficient. The Committee agreed to establish a working party to review the specialist pathway, taking into consideration the recommendations of the House of Representative report. The working party will make recommendations to the Committee. If substantial changes are recommended, there will be stakeholder consultation seeking comments and advice.

Appointment of specialist colleges to perform functions under the National Law

The registration of specialist IMGs is a feature of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The National Law provides for the registration of specialist IMGs who have successfully completed any examination or assessment required by the approved registration standard, to assess the specialist's ability to competently and safely practise in the specialty.

The Board has decided that the assessment or examination will be undertaken by the specialist medical colleges that are accredited by the AMC. At the request of the Board, AHPRA has appointed each AMC accredited specialist college to undertake the assessment of internationally qualified specialists. This appointment provides for colleges and their employees and assessors to be indemnified for exercising these functions under the National Law.

The Committee will be reviewing the terms of the specialist medical college appointments. The aim is to make the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the colleges more explicit.

Dr Joanna Flynn AM
Chair, National Specialist IMG Committee

10 July 2012