



MEDICAL BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION OF NSW

(INCORPORATED IN NEW SOUTH WALES)

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Consultation on funding external Doctors Health Programs

The Medical Benevolent Association of NSW (MBANSW) provides financial assistance and counselling support to doctors in need and their families in NSW and ACT. Referrals come from AHPRA, Indemnity Insurers, colleagues, family members and the doctor themselves. The Medical Benevolent Association of NSW has an interest in the care of Doctors and how their health is managed. The Association is acutely aware of the impact of financial stress on health and recovery from ill health. MBANSW is funded by donation.

In 1981 The Medical Benevolent Association of NSW was instrumental in the establishment of the DHAS in NSW. The catalyst for MBANSW involvement was an overwhelming number of requests for health advice and support at that time. Attention to these many requests prevented the MBANSW Social Worker from attending to the welfare of our beneficiaries. MBANSW is now concerned about the already stretched resources of MBANSW being asked to accommodate additional demand should the DHAS cease to function in NSW.

1. Is there a need for health programs

Yes. The key objective of the National law is “to provide for the protection of the public by ensuring that only **healthy** practitioners...” Good health care is an individual responsibility; however, poor health and sudden illness have a collective/community impact. Some Practitioners are reluctant to seek health advice /assistance from colleagues for fear of the impact on their career.

2. Preferred Model for External Health Programs.

As each state is demographically and geographically different, it would not be helpful to impose one model Australia Wide. The models outlined in the consultation paper have different aims. The VDHP Model is unlike that operating in any other state in its monitoring function. All other models have a preventive and early intervention focus. As a minimum each state should have a 24 hour telephone support/referral service, a website with referral information and an educative function. State services would be funded on a ‘per capita’ basis. Each state would set up services to accommodate differences in geography and demography. The AHPRA office in each state would oversee services and expenditure via an advisory panel.

3. Do you believe it the role of the board to fund external health programs.

In the same way that Health NSW and large employers fund EAP programs, there is an obligation for the medical board to provide a service whereby medical practitioners can seek support or information in a safe and confidential environment on health matters before their competence is affected. Access to a confidential telephone help-line would provide an opportunity for practitioners, students, family members, staff and colleagues with concerns about a practitioner’s health to seek advice and assistance from an experienced professional before health concerns impacted on patient care.

4. Range of services provided by Doctors health Programs

What services 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
- ✓ Research on doctors' health issues
- ✓ Publication of resources – maintaining a website, newsletters, journal articles

Other

- ✓ Advocacy for Doctors Health Issues in work force planning
- ✓ Advice/ assistance with career consultation
- ✓ Informal support during re-entry to work.

5. How much of an increase in registration fees is acceptable to fund doctors health services

As MBANSW is not seeking funding for its Doctors Support Service we have no comment on the increase in registration fees.

Do you have any other comments?

MBANSW previously enjoyed the support of the NSW and ACT Medical Boards with the provision of names and addresses for the Annual Appeal letter (A donation in kind). The letter is used to seek donations and remind Doctors that help is available if needed. Since national registration of medical practitioners, the MBANSW has been forced to purchase the addresses at a cost of \$5000. This amount could have been used to provide financial support to a doctor and/or family with an urgent need due to illness or death.

Meredith McVey
MBANSW Social Worker
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