

## **REPORT ON CURRENT ISSUES**

There has been a great deal of activity recently regarding the issue of registration of medical scientists, which has generated much discussion among members as well as within the profession as a whole. This information is intended to update members on these issues and report on some of the strategies and activities that AIMS has undertaken in this process. It is important to note however that this is complex issue and we are not yet in a position to be able to give definitive answers but I do welcome feedback from members and encourage all to become involved.

AIMS has been actively campaigning for professional registration for very many years, making representations to both Federal and various State governments, and in this we have the support of the vast majority of our members. More recently the question of registration was again brought into focus following the Productivity Commission Report into Australia's Health Workforce which, among other recommendations, proposed the setting up of a national registration and accreditation scheme for health professions. This was approved to by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) which also agreed to establish the National Health Workforce Taskforce. Under the terms of the agreement, the nine professions currently registered in all States and Territories were to be the first to come under the scheme (probably in 2010), followed by those professions that are registered in some jurisdictions. The Taskforce and the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) would then consider the question of registration of other professions, such as medical scientists, that are currently not registered in Australia. We do not know how long this will take.

A profession seeking to gain registration needs to argue its case. To facilitate the process AHMAC has put together a number of criteria that need to be addressed within any submission. Several issues derive from these criteria including questions relating to the size and characteristics of the current medical science workforce, definition of what a medical scientist is and does, how medical scientists are trained, their scope of practice and the level and extent of individual responsibility to name just a few.

In developing the case for registration it is critical that we engage with the broad profession and thus we need to recognise that there are many groups that represent medical scientists. It is also critical however that we in the profession present a single argument to Government and act on a united front as anything less would fail at the outset. The Pathology Associations Council (PAC) is grouping of the various organisations that represent pathology viz. AIMS, AACB, ASM, HGSA, ACS, ASCIA, ESA, ANZSBT, HSAZ, NCOPP, AAPP, HISA, IAP and RCPA. This committee has in fact been in existence for some time but more recently has been revitalised and extended so that it might act as a forum where these issues can be debated and put forward from a single point. The secretariat and chair of this committee currently reside with the RCPA but, with the support of all member groups, those roles will be taken on by AIMS from 2010.

PAC has established several working parties, of which I am a member as a representative of AIMS, to examine in more detail the issues that have emerged from the initial debate over registration. These include workforce issues including the shortage of medical scientists, scope of practice and training and professional advancement as well as registration. An early step has been to review the Competency Standards for Medical Scientists and members were asked for comment on the existing document last year. The working parties are beginning the process of reviewing their specific topics and members will be kept informed of the outcome of these discussions. The revised Competency Standards are here <http://www.aims.org.au/c/index.php?page=competency-based-stds>

One matter that has become clear from early work is a deep concern with the workforce and indications of a significant shortage of qualified scientists. As there is no central database of those in the medical scientist workforce (as there is with registrable professions) we have no simple way of addressing this concern. In response to the issue however the Federal Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) has established a Pathology Workforce project in which a survey will be conducted to establish the numbers and demographic profile of medical scientists in Australia. This information is not only vitally important for workforce planning but will also act as a crucial information-gathering process to prepare the case for registration. It is intended that the survey will take place this year.

Members should also note that AIMS has recently made written submissions to, and met with, the DoHA Pathology Professions Workforce Issues and Strategies taskforce and the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission. Registration of medical scientists was raised in these submissions, as were role extensions for medical scientists and the allocation of provider numbers to scientists. The text of these submissions is available to view in the Member Lounge of the AIMS website. AIMS has also written to or met with some State Government representatives which have been actively assessing workforce issues.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of these issues, please do not hesitate to contact me through AIMS National Office.

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