



**AMA (NSW) Submission to the Senate Finance and
Public Administration References Committee Inquiry
into the administration of health practitioner registration
by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency**

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Australian Medical Association (NSW) Limited (AMA NSW) is the peak body representing the medico-political interests of doctors in NSW.

The AMA NSW represents doctors in training, career medical officers, staff specialists, visiting medical officers and specialists and general practitioners in private practice.

The AMA NSW supports and endorses the submissions made by Federal AMA on 14 April 2011. We seek to make brief comments in addition to the federal submission regarding two specific issues, as follows:-

(d) implications of any maladministration of the registration process for Medicare benefits and private health insurance claims

Since the introduction of the scheme, 38 medical practitioners in NSW have contacted AMA NSW to advise that their registration had lapsed. In the vast majority cases, the doctor did not receive advice of their renewal. We note that many other doctors may have been impacted and may not have contacted AMA NSW.

NSW was over-represented in terms of lapsing doctors because NSW retained the system of staggered renewals with doctors continuing to renew throughout the year. As a result, while doctors renewing at 30 September 2010 received reminder emails and in some instances telephone calls, the majority of the doctors contacting the AMA first became aware that their registration had lapsed on receipt of correspondence from Medicare or on advice from a patient that a Medicare claim had been rejected.

While 38 doctors may seem a small number, the practical impact of this was many hundreds of cancelled patients and procedures. We had doctors in regional hospitals who had to find cover for their on call commitments and members who rescheduled surgery to weekends so patients did not have to wait months to get back to having their operations.

We note the efforts of senior staff at AHPRA NSW to find options to expedite returning of doctors to the register. However, these efforts were based on the personal endeavors and co-operation of staff, rather than any established system processes.

Of more concern was the long term failure to address the impact for patients of doctors who had inadvertently continued to practice while they were deregistered. As a result of their lack of knowledge, patients were unable receive Medicare reimbursements. These transitional problems were foreseeable, however, we had to assist doctors and their patients through many months of uncertainty while decisions were about the most appropriate options for providing access to Medicare payments. AHPRA, Medicare and the Department of Health should have acted much more expeditiously to protect the

interests of patients and doctors in find more appropriate resolutions to the issue of payments.

We believe that the number of lapsing doctors would have been far worse but for the efforts of AMA NSW to communicate regularly with members. We provided regular email updates and information for members. In the past few months, we have responded to over 300 members, just on issues surrounding national registration, bringing in additional staff to answer telephone calls during peak periods.

(h) AHPRA's complaints handling processes

It is important to note that NSW has remained outside the national scheme in terms of the handling of complaints. This was a result of lobbying by AMA NSW and other NSW health groups including the ADA NSW and the Pharmacy Guild NSW. Our members have been supportive of the protections this carve out has offered to them and the patients of NSW. NSW has the largest number of registered health professionals in Australia and very established complaints procedures. It is our view that the national scheme would have been even more compromised had the system also had to manage the complaints and performance issues for NSW registrations, as was proposed under the initial scheme.

Dr Michael Steiner
President, AMA NSW
14 April 2011