

Medical groups oppose registration plans



On 21 February AMA (NSW) hosted a crisis meeting to discuss the Council of Australian Governments' blueprint for a cross-professional registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals.

Representatives of the AMA, several medical colleges, the Australian Salaried Medical Officers Association, the NSW Medical Board and the Australian Doctors Fund were unanimous in their opposition to the scheme.

Federal AMA President Dr Mukesh Haikerwal and AMA Secretary-General Dr Robyn Mason traveled to Sydney to address the meeting. AMA Federal Vice President and former AMA (NSW) President, Dr Choong-Siew Yong, who has represented the AMA on registration issues for several years, opened the meeting. Other speakers were Professor Peter Procopis, President of the NSW Medical Board; Mr Stephen Milgate of the Australian Doctors Fund and Ms Andrea Kunz, AMA (NSW) Senior Policy Adviser.



Dr Yong said that a national registration scheme based on a driver's licence model of mutual recognition had been well advanced before the COAG scheme had been drawn up. The COAG plan was based on the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report into the health workforce, which recommended task substitution as a cost-saving measure. Task substitution had been adopted by COAG through proposed control over accreditation.

Dr Mason explained the AMA's alternative, comprising a national medical registration authority to set national standards and the retention of the state medical boards with their current responsibilities. The AMA proposed a separate national body to service a national database of registered doctors. Dr Mason said the AMA was completely opposed to a cross-professional accreditation scheme, because of its potential to undermine health care standards.

After the meeting a lively discussion took place. A number of speakers emphasised that the profession needed to be united and proactive if doctors wished to see professional independence and current standards maintained. AMA speakers said that their approaches to the Federal

Government to maintain separate registration for medical practitioners had been well received but that the Federal Government could not override the states and territories in the COAG.

The statement issued after the meeting said the scheme had the potential to end medical practice in Australia in its current form, by rendering the specialist colleges irrelevant in training and lowering registration standards.

"The highly-trained family doctor and other specialist doctors could cease to exist. Politicians and bureaucrats would determine what is required to diagnose and treat medical conditions. This could lead to surgery and other treatments being performed by people who have not had any formal medical education," said AMA (NSW) President Dr Andrew Keegan.

"The proposal will lower medical standards and the quality of patient care, if approved at the next COAG meeting this month. The disaster at Bundaberg Hospital clearly illustrated what happens when bureaucrats and administrators decide on the adequacy of medical credentials."

