

Council of Medical Colleges calls on Government to put patient safety first with health workforce regulatory review

Doctors and other medical specialists support a review of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act but are warning that the Government's proposal to relax regulations and workforce standards will reduce the standard of care in our health system and put patients at risk.

Consultation closed last night on the Government's *Putting Patients First: Modernising health workforce regulation*", a review of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. The document signals removing the safeguards that prevent health professionals from delivering services that they are not appropriately skilled in doing.

Council of Medical Colleges Chair Dr Samantha Murton says medical specialist colleges support updating workforce regulations to improve the regulatory system but the direction signalled by the Government consultation document appears to put patient safety second to expanding the workforce.

"The document lays out a direction of workforce shortages driving regulatory decisions not patient care and safety."

"New Zealand has a serious health workforce shortage and also has the highest number of overseas trained doctors in the OECD. The way to address the shortages is to continue to embrace and support health workers coming to New Zealand to practice safely in a new environment but also to invest in training our own health workers. This means investing the money needed to provide places for both locally trained workers and appropriately qualified international medical graduates."

Last year, the medical specialist colleges supported implementing a fast-track process for comparable qualifications and overseas health systems for international medical professionals but the proposals in the consultation document indicate that the Government wants to go further regardless of the skills and qualification differences to New Zealand.

"When New Zealanders need our health system, they have a basic expectation that the health professional they're dealing with is appropriately trained and skilled in the treatment they are delivering and understands how to do that within a NZ health system."

The Council of Medical Colleges is also concerned that the submission form for the consultation consisted of leading questions, some with yes or no answers only. Requests to change the document for a fairer process were refused.

"Health professionals and their representative bodies are committed to providing a standard of care that meets the expectations of all New Zealanders," Dr Samantha Murton says. "We urge the Government to approach this with an open mind and work with the sector on constructive ways to increase the health workforce without jeopardising patient safety."

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Council of Medical Colleges in New Zealand represents eighteen medical colleges who provide support to over 9000 medical practitioners working in a range of specialties in the Aotearoa New Zealand health system. Medical colleges are educational bodies responsible for the training, examination and recertification of medical practitioners in specific medical disciplines. This statement reflects the majority view of the colleges.

Key information missing from *Putting Patients First: Modernising health workforce regulation*:

- New Zealand has one of the highest proportion of International Medical Graduates amongst OECD countries at 43.4% of New Zealand's medical workforce
- The Medical Practitioners regulatory authority the Medical Council of New Zealand recognises 26 countries as having comparable health systems to New Zealand for registration
- Despite an increase to medical student places, there has not been a substantial increase in funded training places and some specialties, like general practitioners, do not have their training funded by the Government (only for the first year)
- Cultural safety and competency is considered by the colleges to be a core competency that drives better patient outcomes as doctors need to understand their patients and patients expect doctors to understand their cultural context.