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**HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (NEW ZEALAND OVERSEAS
 TRAINED DOCTORS) BILL 2009**
SOME GLARING ANOMALIES FIXED, BUT MORE TO DO - AMA

The *Health Insurance Amendment (New Zealand Overseas Trained Doctors) Bill 2009* was introduced to Parliament this morning. The Bill will amend the *Health Insurance Act 1973*.

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said today that the new Bill would fix some of the glaring anomalies in a scheme that is being increasingly questioned by the medical profession and the community.

Dr Pesce said the AMA had written to Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, last month in support of proposed changes to the Health Insurance Act, especially around the so-called '10-year moratorium', whereby International Medical Graduates (IMGs) must work in a district of workforce shortage for a minimum period of 10 years.

The key changes are:

- The legislation will be amended so the moratorium starts from when the doctor first gains medical registration (not upon gaining permanent residency, as is the situation currently);
- New Zealand residents who study medicine in Australia and choose to stay will not be subject to the moratorium; and
- Australian residents who study medicine in New Zealand and then return to Australia will no longer be subject to the moratorium.

The Department of Health and Ageing is also implementing streamlined administrative processes, which mean that many IMGs will no longer have to apply for a provider number every few years.

Dr Pesce said the AMA is pleased that these changes are reflected in the Bill introduced to Parliament today, but they should be considered as just the beginning.

“The AMA has identified a series of issues and inconsistencies around the operation of a scheme that affects IMGs working in Australia, and we believe these should be investigated further,” Dr Pesce said.

“IMGs make a valuable contribution to the medical workforce, particularly in rural and remote Australia because of the long-term shortage of GPs and specialists in these areas.

“These doctors need more support to enable them to improve their contribution to patient care and to encourage them to seek a permanent place in the medical workforce - and we need to send a strong message to rural communities that every effort is being made to ensure they have access to quality care from a doctor.

“The AMA believes that all doctors and their families should be treated with dignity and fairness while they are working in Australia. Our Federal Council will be discussing the Bill and other matters relating to IMGs when it meets in Canberra early next month,” Dr Pesce said.

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