

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604

Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499

Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>

NRAS BILL STILL FAILS THE PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

While welcoming some progress this week from the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council on the exposure draft of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009*, the AMA believes the Government's national registration and accreditation scheme is still unacceptable to the medical profession and the community because it fails the public interest test.

The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009 (Bill B)* underpins the new National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) for the Health Professions, which is due to commence on 1 July 2010.

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said today that proposed additional words in relation to the reserve powers of the Ministerial Council to issue directions on accreditation standards are not robust enough to protect the public interest in terms of accreditation standards for medical education and training.

“The revised words do not go far enough to protect the public interest,” Dr Pesce said.

“The Health Ministers have not done enough to give the community confidence and security that the new Scheme will ensure safety, quality, and the highest standards in medical training, and ultimately the services themselves. There is no iron-clad guarantee that medical training standards would not be compromised by the new arrangements.”

Dr Pesce said the Ministerial Council's Communiqué says there would be a requirement for Ministers to give initial consideration to quality and safety above all else, but there is no guarantee they would act on this consideration.

“The Ministers have failed to guarantee that they would put quality and safety and other public interest considerations ahead of workforce supply considerations.

“Given the serious risks this could pose to the health of the community, we don't know why the Ministers couldn't have agreed to undertake a full public interest test before exercising the power to issue a direction in relation to accreditation standards.

“The AMA put this suggestion to the Ministers with the support of the members of the Senate Committee Inquiry. The AMA will continue to seek to have a comprehensive public interest test incorporated into the Bill.

“In the short term, we will call on each State Parliament to amend the Bill in accordance with our calls for a public interest test.

“If the final Scheme allows Ministers to issue directions on accreditation standards – without the checks and balances proposed by the AMA – we will remain open to looking at alternative, more independent, registration and accreditation arrangements for doctors.

“The medical profession wants no part of a Scheme that fails to protect the interests of patients and the community and which compromises the future training of doctors in Australia,” Dr Pesce said.

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CONTACT: John Flannery
Peter Jean

02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
02 6270 54 64 / 0427 209 753