

9 May 2013

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Vocational recognition for Addiction Medicine

Dear Susan

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Medical Council on the proposed application it has received from the Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians for the recognition of Addiction Medicine as a vocational scope of practice.

The NZMA is the country's foremost voluntary pan-professional medical organisation with over 5,000 members. Our members come from all disciplines within the medical profession and include specialists, general practitioners, doctors-in-training and medical students. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and promote professional unity and values, and the health of New Zealanders. Our submission has been informed by consultations with our Specialist Council, General Practice Council and the Board.

While the NZMA remains opposed, in principle, to the proliferation of vocational scopes of practice (and the resulting growth of sub-specialisation), our organisation acknowledges that there are robust grounds for addiction medicine to be recognised as a vocational scope in New Zealand. Addiction medicine has, as a focus, a high prevalence group of disorders. It is estimated that serious drug misuse and addictions affect 3.5 percent of the total population or

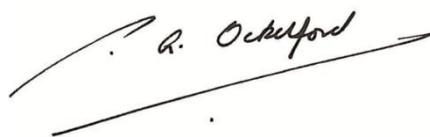
around 150,000 New Zealanders.¹ Patients with these disorders would benefit from the interventions that come from a group of medical practitioners who are fully informed of current best evidence, and who work to further expand the body of knowledge relating to addiction medicine. Like many areas of medicine, there will be a degree of overlap between doctors who work in addiction medicine and doctors who work predominantly in other scopes of practice (e.g. Family Medicine and General Practice, Internal Medicine, Psychiatry, Public Health, and Emergency Medicine). However, none of these other scopes of practice have addiction as their primary focus.

There are some concerns that the proposal for recognition of addiction medicine as a separate vocational scope could lead to further fragmentation of the addictions treatment workforce. A possible alternative to separate vocational recognition could be to explore the merits of providing further qualifications (by way of a diploma or similar) to medical professionals with a special interest in addiction medicine who are working in another scope of practice. Nevertheless, the NZMA believes that addiction specialists who have completed a clear training pathway would have a certain skill set and knowledge base that they could employ that would set them apart from other medical practitioners, including those with a special interest in addiction medicine. Ensuring effective collaboration between all members of the addictions treatment workforce is obviously vital in achieving good outcomes in this field.

The NZMA notes that addiction medicine was accepted as a separate medical specialty in 2006 by the Australian Medical Council, and we endorse the definition of the scope of practice for addiction medicine that has been proposed in the application to the Council. We agree that the scope of addiction medicine has advanced to include its own body of knowledge, system of peer reviewed publications and formal training. Our general concerns about the proliferation of scopes of practice notwithstanding, the NZMA believes that recognising addiction medicine as a new and separate scope of practice fulfils a recognised health need and should contribute to improved medical care.

We hope that our comments are helpful and look forward to learning the outcome of this particular application.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. Ockelford", with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Dr Paul Ockelford
NZMA Chair

¹ National Committee for Addiction Treatment. Addiction treatment is everybody's business: Where to from here? Wellington, 2011. Available from http://www.ncat.org.nz/files/NCAT_20pg_Booklet_web.pdf