

Australian Osteopathic Association submission regarding the Review Of Mutual Recognition Schemes

Introduction to Osteopathy

The Australian Osteopathic Association (AOA) is the national professional body representing Osteopaths in Australia. Originally founded in 1955 in Victoria, the Association became a federal body in 1991 and today represents Osteopaths across Australia.

Our core work is liaising with state and federal government, all other statutory bodies regarding professional, educational, legislative and regulatory issues associated with osteopathy and health services provision, as well as with private enterprise.

Osteopaths are registered health practitioners, and one of the nine registered health professions in every state and territory of Australia. Osteopathy has been a registered profession in Australia for 30 years.

Currently an Osteopath undertakes a 5-year, University Masters degree to achieve registration. This is a considerably higher level of education than osteopathic schools in most other international jurisdictions, with the exemption of USA.

Overseas trained Osteopaths can be examined to gain registration in Australia via three routes - Western Australia, Victoria (most other states refer people to Victoria), or via New Zealand. The assessment and criteria differ in each jurisdiction.

National Registration of Health Professions

Under COAG agreement, Osteopathy is one of the nine registered health professions that will move to national health registration in July 2010. In many regards this will supersede any conditions or obstacles to freedom of movement of registered health professionals between states in Australia.

Mutual Recognition Agreement and the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement

The AOA has only a few comments to highlight in this submission regarding the Mutual Recognition Agreement and the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement, and as such generally is very supportive of the ability of health professionals to move easily among jurisdictions. The comments have been highlighted below:

Communication between Jurisdictions

The AOA would like to see greater co-ordination, standardisation and open communication across all jurisdictions to ensure that processes work effectively and efficiently. This would be greatly improved by more standardised electronic registration systems and records.

However we are also keen to see that systems are in place to ensure that information (particularly in relation to practitioners who may have been flagged or previously the

subject of complaint investigations) is readily available for other jurisdictions during registration processes.

Currently many processes are paper based and place a burden of responsibility on the practitioner to comply with a diverse range of processes and fees depending on where they are applying or moving too. The lack of standardised processes across jurisdictions is an impediment to ease and efficiency of workplace movement.

“Shopping and Hopping”

Currently between individual states in Australia and in New Zealand there are differing styles and/or criteria for the examination and assessment of skills of overseas trained Osteopaths. The AOA is concerned that the lack of standardisation in examination of overseas trained Osteopaths can easily allow for ‘shopping and hopping’.

From the AOA experience we frequently receive calls from overseas trained osteopaths asking which jurisdiction is easiest and/or cheapest to gain registration in Australia. Many callers will also ask further questions on the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement and their options to enter Australia as an Osteopath through New Zealand.

As highlighted earlier, an Osteopath undertakes a 5-year, University Masters degree to achieve registration. This is a considerably higher level of education than osteopathic schools in most other international jurisdictions. Without standardisation of assessment of overseas trained osteopaths and of accreditation of all osteopathy university courses further “shopping and hopping” will be inevitable.

Equivalence in Title without Equivalence in Qualifications

The standard of education and training provided to achieve the title of Osteopath varies greatly around the globe. In many countries Osteopathy is not even a registered profession and courses may be undertaken outside of universities. As highlighted earlier, an Australian Osteopath undertakes a 5-year, University Masters degree to achieve registration.

The AOA is gravely concerned that without the standardisation of qualification minimums and assessment for overseas trained osteopaths that registration under the Mutual Recognition Agreement and the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement may place the general public at risk. With no ability of jurisdictions to expect applicants to upgrade skills or achieve a minimum qualification, the level of skill among qualified Osteopaths may vary considerably due to differing entrance requirements.

Alternative Models

The AOA would like to ensure that if any further models of mutual recognition are considered, that particular focus is given to the possible risks involved in allowing practitioners with lower qualifications or standards, to practice in Australia, placing both the profession and the public at risk.

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