

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a registered Physiotherapist, and I wish to describe the difficulties A.H.P.R.A. has given me since February 2011.

I graduated from LaTrobe University in 2008, and have completed numerous continuing education courses, lectures and seminars. I am completing a Graduate Certificate in Sports Physiotherapy in order to go onto a Masters course. I also have a teaching role at LaTrobe University.

I am writing to express my concern with AHPRA's renewal process. On February 4th, 2011, I read an email sent to me from the Australian Physiotherapy Association (dated 2nd February, 2011) warning of risk of being removed from the Register of Physiotherapists due to 'problems' with A.H.P.R.A.'s renewal processes.

I originally completed my renewal when I received my letter in the mail in November, and paid on credit card. But after receiving this email I then checked to discover that I was no longer on the register without my knowing. I had been treating **unregistered** on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th February **unknowingly**.

It took four separate attempts to get through to A.H.P.R.A. on Friday 4th February, all waiting on hold for about 20mins each before being cut off the line. I ended up leaving an enquiry on their website at 3.39PM

I continued to try and call the hotline, then, at 4.39PM I got through to an employee by the name of Andrew, who confirmed I was dropped from the register, because **perhaps they had 'lost' my forms**. I have three other colleagues at my clinic alone in the same situation, two physiotherapists, and one podiatrist. He said to complete the Fast Track Renewal form and proceeded to email it to me. He said it would **take 48hours to process from the time of receipt**. Looking upon the form once I received it (at Fri, Feb 4, 2011 at 5:00 PM) I noted at the bottom that the only two ways to return the form was by post (wasting MORE valuable working time) or in person to the Bourke Street Melbourne Office.

I then had to ring my clinic I work from to cancel/shift all of my patients from Saturday, Monday and Tuesday (thinking that this would cover 48 business hours if I went into the Bourke Street Office first thing on Monday morning. I lost a full day of patients each of these days, not to mention putting out my patients last minute from their plans to receive treatment.

On Monday morning I went to the Bourke Street Office of AHPRA – at 8.45am with a colleague in the same situation. We were served by an employee by the name of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] confirmed what the hotline operators said on Friday. She said

that there were apparently emails, letters and SMSs sent to advise people of the 'one month grace' period extending the renewal cut off to 31st January 2011. Correct me if I am wrong, but by having a 'grace period' is this not admitting fault with reregistration processes? Frustratingly, we, nor anybody we work with in the health profession did not receive these reminders, and consequently we were not aware that our registrations had not been received and that there had been more time to resubmit them.

██████████ also proceeded to tell us that the Fast Track form would take a **MINIMUM of 48hours** (rather than just 48hours like the hotline operator had told us on Friday prior). Because of this we had to then recontact our patients for Wednesday and cancel/reschedule these clients. Please note, patients who were originally booked in for Monday and Tuesday appointments and changed to Wednesday were then **changed again**.

At 12.25PM Monday 7th February, I received a reply to the enquiry I left on the Friday stating:

"Dear ██████████,

Thank you for your enquiry. Your enquiry has been escalated to an information/registration specialist who will advise you via email accordingly.

Thank you for contacting AHPRA,

The Customer Service Team

AHPRA Enquiry Contact Centre"

Interestingly, I have not received any other correspondence since this reply with regards to this enquiry.

On 9th February 2011, I telephoned to check the status of my FastTrack Application form, where an operator by the name of ██████████ placed me on hold for about 15minutes. I was transferred through to the Specialists Line in Victoria and spoke with ██████████.

██████████ told that the form had not been scanned in as yet, which is the first step in the process. I then asked if my form could please be located, and I was transferred through to ██████████ (the employee who I had submitted the FastTrack Form to). She said it hasn't been looked at yet, as it was **still in the tray that she had placed it in on Monday** when I submitted it. She said they are processed by chronological order, and they have been very busy. I asked how long will it take to be even be looked at, and she said **'I have no idea'**. This is very concerning as I have patients who need treatment and I am committed to running regular Clinical Pilates Classes. It was apparent to me at this stage that I would be able to give my patients no time frame of my availability nor warning of rescheduling of appointments.

██████████ then placed me on hold. She said she would take it to the department to be seen to, from there it would just be waiting for a Criminal Check. To hurry the process, I asked where it was sent to do the criminal check – she said the police. I asked if I could have the contact details to call them and ask how long it would take. She said she couldn't give me those details. **This is freedom of information which I was denied, particularly as they were sending my personal information to a separate body.** I then asked how long it would take from here. She said that she didn't know. I asked on average/worst case scenario – she said she didn't know. I said should I cancel a further 2 days of clients or

2weeks, and she said she had 'no idea'. I then cancelled Thursday and Friday patient lists.

Frustrated and considering the urgency I needed answers, I then sent urgent emails to Ms Roxon, the Minister for Health and Aging, and Mr. Peter Dutton, the Shadow Minister for Health and Aging, (Please see Appendix 1). This was on the 10th of February, 2011.

That afternoon at 4.45PM I was contacted by [REDACTED], at the Office of Peter Dutton informing me that they had received many complaints about A.H.P.R.A. and that someone would contact me shortly to resolve my issues.

At 5.00PM I received a telephone call from [REDACTED], [REDACTED] ACT AHPRA Branch. He informed me that he would personally update me on my registration renewal, and it was just waiting on a Police Check. He admitted that I should not have been given conflicting information with regards to the length of time for the renewal to be processed. He confirmed I should have received correspondence that my registration was not updated and that there was a grace period to complete it. He said it was very chaotic at the Melbourne office due to the influx of all of the renewals and FastTrack Application forms, and this is why it was taking longer than 48 hours for someone to even look at forms. He also informed me that he expected that I would be back on the register by Friday 11th February, and that he would personally call me to confirm this.

I never received a telephone call. I had to repeatedly check the Register, and by 3pm I was still not on the register. I made the decision then to cancel my Saturday session, in order to give my patients enough notice.

It was not until 4.30PM that I was back on the Register for Physiotherapy on Friday 11th February, 2011.

Implication for my practice and concerns:

- Why were my renewal papers lost initially? Three other practitioners at my clinic alone were in the same position. The Australian Physiotherapy Association and the Office of Shadow Minister for Health and Aging Peter Dutton also confirmed there were hundreds of other physiotherapists and Allied Health Professionals whose paperwork had been lost
- Why was I not informed that my paperwork had not been received and that there was still a 'Grace Period' in which to act?
- Why was my registration lapsed and I was not informed by AHPRA officially until a letter dated 16th February, 2011, but not received until 1st March, 2011? It is concerning to think that I could have been practicing for **one month unregistered**
- I received a courtesy call from Medicare on 16th February that my registration had lapsed from 3rd February to the 9th of February.
 - o This may affect my Professional Indemnity Insurance
 - o This may affect any Medicare rebates, WorkCover, TAC or DVA clients saw during this time
 - o This may also affect any private health insurance rebates my patients were entitled to during this time
 - o I was advised to complain to the Health Minister again for compensation

- Why was AHPRA so quick to contact Medicare and not myself, considering the dire consequences of practicing unregistered, when they were well aware of the issues that had been experiencing
- Why did I not receive the renewal reminder letter, email or SMS in January when several AHPRA employees confirmed that I should have?
- Will my registration be backdated to cover the dates I was deregistered for?
- **Will there be compensation** for the seven days I was unable to work due to AHPRA's apparent incompetence after losing my paperwork. **I believe that I did nothing wrong in the Registration Process**, however, I was forced to cancel 7 days of patient lists. I would usually work 9 hours a day, which totals 63 hours of work. I charge patients \$70.00 per half hour visit. I have calculated I have lost at least \$8820.00 from direct time unable to work. Furthermore, as a result of this issue, I have lost ongoing clients, whom I may have seen several times beyond the direct time affected by the registration issues. I am a private contractor and as such I rely on direct income as I do not have leave entitlements

I recognize that with the previous state driven Physiotherapy Board of Victoria I had no issues and the renewal process I undertook was smooth and stress free. Why would there be a change in this?

Appendix 1:

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 10 February 2014 10:07 AM
To: Roxon, Nicola (MP)
Cc: Dutton, Peter (MP)
Subject: AHPRA has stolen my right to work



Dear Ms Roxon,

I am wishing to speak to you regarding my unfair deregistration from the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) as a result of their losing my renewal papers and payment which I made in good time back in November. I am now unable to work until they reregister me as a Physiotherapist. They claimed to send out reminder notices in January which I, nor the 25 other practitioners in a clinic I practice with, did not receive. And thus I have been removed from the register, and I am now unable to work. It is obvious their incompetence regarding their conduct as there are 3 practitioners at my clinic similarly affected - and a simple Google search regarding their mistreatment of thousands of health workers across Australia, since AHPRA first began in July. I note that you have acknowledged the problem - saying you will need to meet with other members in your department to clear up the matter - However I am still unable to work - I have not worked since last Thursday 3rd Feb - and I am angry I was not notified by AHPRA that I was in this situation, as I was practicing for 3 days unregistered without my knowing. I discovered I was in this situation from an 'general warning to check' email I received from Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) who are unrelated to AHPRA (pasted below). What sort of communication is this??

I am now out of pocket several thousand dollars as a result of this incompetence, and who knows how much longer I am going to continue to lose money, and my patient lists which I worked so hard to build up.

9am Monday 7th Feb I hand delivered my 'Fast Track' Registration form to the Bourke Street Office desk of AHPRA in Melbourne. When I telephoned on Wednesday 9th Feb, I was told it was still sitting in the tray it was left in on Monday, and no one had even looked at it. Now I have been told it is awaiting a Police Check, which can take up to 10days to process, however, AHPRA's representative conceded that she really had "no idea" how long it will take. This is appalling considering this 'Fast Track Application' was supposedly meant to take 48 hours.

I am also concerned, as you would probably understand, the implications of me working last week for 3 days unregistered, however the pressing issue is that I am still unable to work.

Interestingly - I am still yet to be notified of my deregistration by AHPRA - if I had not received an email from APA, how would I have known to stop practicing??

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e-Update



Dear [REDACTED],

AHPRA's Register of Physiotherapists – Renewal problems?

AHPRA's renewal process has caused significant problems for many APA members, and we have been working on behalf of our members to attempt to resolve these issues over the last few weeks.

What has become clear is that there has been a major system breakdown at AHPRA. Approximately 10% of the physiotherapy workforce in Victoria has not renewed their registration and are at risk of being removed from the register.

It is critical that you check to see if your registration is current.

You CANNOT practice as a physiotherapist if you do not have current registration.

Therefore if you have not already done so, you should urgently check your registration status by [clicking here](#) and filling in your details. Check that your registration expiry date reads 31/11/2011.

If it doesn't, [click here](#) to check if your renewal is currently in progress.

AHPRA has advised physiotherapists who did not renew their registration by the 31 January deadline, and who wish to practise as a physiotherapist, need to reapply for registration using AHPRA's online [enquiry form](#) requesting a fast track application form. Once the completed application is received, AHPRA says that it will process most applications within 48 hours.

All APA members who have been removed from the register, or experienced renewal problems because of AHPRA's issues, should [click here](#) to notify the APA of their problems. Once you have provided your details and clicked **done**, you will be taken to a page that allows you to download the fast track registration application form.

[REDACTED]