

18 April 2011

The Secretary
Finance and Public Administration Committee
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Please refer to the Committee's enquiry about administrative difficulties with the National Registration Scheme for health professionals.

Osteopathy is one of the original professions selected for inclusion in the first stage of the Scheme. Since 1 July 2010, therefore, members of the Australian Osteopathic Association have been affected by the organizational and administrative difficulties which are the subject of your Committee's enquiry.

As the scheme was under development, AOA was included in the quite extensive consultations. This is appreciated. It is a matter of record that we made a variety of suggestions but these were not taken up. Nevertheless, we accepted most elements of the outcome and have sought to co-operate with the new structures.

It is fair to say, however, that the process of implementation was over-hasty. Many mistakes seem to have been made as a result. It would seem that there was a measure of over-confidence that the different State-based systems, with ingrained institutional habits, could be more readily assimilated into a national scheme.

Members of AOA appear, in large part, to have experienced neither delays nor errors in their registration. We understand the same cannot be said for some other professions with larger numbers of members.

It is unfortunate that patients and professionals alike have been the ones disadvantaged. AOA supports urgent action to fix the all-too-evident problems. AOA stands ready to co-operate in these endeavours.

One of the intended outcomes of the National scheme was that each practitioner be issued with a Provider Number, as the e-health reforms are developed. It is fair to say that the e-health initiative has seen huge financial outlays, massive delays and indecision, with very few tangible outcomes. As of now, practitioners who have been successfully registered under the Scheme have their numbers but patients do not, and will not exercise a choice to have theirs until some time next year.

Finally, AOA wishes to bring to notice again that the National Law now allows persons we regard as unqualified to manipulate the spine (other than the cervical (spine)). **This situation is very dangerous and it's only a matter of time before someone is harmed, or worse.**

The decision to allow unqualified people to do spinal manipulation was based on no publicly-available report. Nor was the osteopathic profession consulted in any way. It appears to have been a "deal" between Ministers for a compromise.

In the present chaotic situation where no-one really knows whether they are duly registered, the potential for physical harm to an innocent and trusting patient is significant. And, given the uncertainty of some practitioners' status, the legal and insurance issues that might arise could likewise be significant.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. Nothing in it is confidential.

We request an opportunity to be heard when the Committee is taking evidence.

Yours sincerely

Damien J Guengerich
President