

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Madam/Sir

I am a Community Pharmacist practicing in _____, Central West NSW.

I have had some experience with the bodies responsible for the registration of Pharmacists and Pharmacies through my personal registration as a Pharmacist as well as registration of Premises for the Pharmacies I own, and I have trained about ten Intern Pharmacists and observed their interactions with the previous registration body.

I have had some other limited experience in dealing with Government bodies as a Member of Parliament for one term between 1999 and 2001.

My comments cover Terms of Reference a,b,c,f,g and h.

I note that my concerns and those of my colleagues are expressed with exasperation at AHPRA, but I recognise that we have no way of knowing any “behind the scenes” influences which may impact on AHPRA to deliver a satisfactory service, such as budget constraints or access to training or physical resources. So the blame for problems experienced will be apportioned by the Committee.

I anticipate that there will be many instances where officials from AHPRA will reject comments by my colleagues in their submissions, but from my experience talking at length to many, the responses by AHPRA staff have been frequently different and contradict what has been said in response to similar questions. Therefore there may be inaccuracies in what is claimed, but this will largely due to inaccurate information supplied by AHPRA staff.

In our Pharmacies we have had three Interns during the last twelve months or so and they have all been impacted by AHPRA’s behavior in different ways.

The first had some difficulties passing the old NSW Pharmacy Board exams, but after several attempts was successful meeting their requirements. In fact, his successful attempt at passing the final Oral Exam was under the auspices of AHPRA and then our fun began!

He was advised that he had passed his exam in early October and immediately submitted the required paperwork. At this stage our expectations as far as being advised that he was registered was based on our extensive experience with previous interns who were advised within a few days that they were now registered. After about two weeks we were concerned that there was something wrong and over the following two weeks he left three

messages on the AHPRA phone system and three email messages. Of these there was only one reply to a phone message, and that reply said to pursue any requests by email!

I also tried to intervene and after phoning AHPRA and leaving phone messages myself, I called the office of our Local Member and was given some other phone numbers to try. We were subsequently supplied with several media releases from AHPRA indicating that the expected time for paperwork to be completed would be four weeks and that the reason for the extended length of time was that it took time to complete police checks.

Later, Media Releases stated that the time frame would be four to six weeks and that much of the time delay was due to incomplete forms being submitted.

At this point we were still amazed that there could be such a difference in the turnaround time, and that if, indeed, police checks were the hold up, why these were not requested at any time during the previous Intern year!

This pharmacist was actually registered approximately four weeks after submitting his paperwork, though he was told that he would not be advised personally, rather he would have to continually check to see if his name showed up on the AHPRA website. A just recognition of the efforts of young Australians after seven years of senior school, university and post graduate study? I think not!

At this stage we thought that AHPRA were having initial “teething problems” and that all would improve.

Another of our Interns passed all her exams and completed her required intern hours and submitted paperwork in early January. She had called AHPRA during December as she was concerned that her Intern registration would expire before her full registration was processed. During these phone calls she was variously told that the process would take “four to six weeks” and “six to eight” weeks.

I was amazed to find that she had to pay to renew her Intern registration so when AHPRA got around to reviewing her application she would still be listed on the system. This was despite the fact that the very reason her registration would expire was that AHPRA was so slow in processing the applications!

She was told that she would receive a pro rata refund around two weeks after her registration was complete. That refund arrived approximately eight weeks later.

The financial implications for these two pharmacists due to the new time frame for registration compared to the old time frame under the State Board was loss of earnings between \$2000 to \$4000, but at least they both continued to be employed.

At the same time, two interns who were working at _____ also completed their exams and submitted their paperwork to be registered. These pharmacists had been offered jobs at another hospital in Western NSW. However as they were employed under

contract at _____, when their required hours were complete their contract expired. Because they were still not registered they were unable to commence their new contracts so these unfortunates were actually unemployed for eight weeks and unable to earn an income at all!

To my mind there is no excuse AHPRA can use to justify the huge difference in time required to process these applications.

I have seen excuses such as inadequately completed paperwork. I would ask if we should believe that the current crop of students are so intellectually inept compared to previous cohorts that there are statistics that can demonstrate that they are less able to fill in forms accurately.

That there are a lot of people applying for registration at the same time! Of course there are more people applying at this time of the year as it is twelve months since most Interns commenced their registration year, the same as every other year!

That the process has to keep up with that experienced in other states! Where is the evidence that shows that a longer process allegedly adopted by other states has resulted in greater protection of the community from rogue pharmacists inadequately prepared for the responsibilities they have been trained to deliver?

That police checks add to the processing time. Why can this not be done at an earlier stage? A police check is not contingent on achieving a pass mark of their Intern Year.

I trust that the submissions of the many Interns that I know and the Pharmacy Guild will be recognised by the committee. Many of the Interns I have spoken to at the beginning of their year have had similar frustrations with AHPRA in actually registering to commence their Intern Year. An eight week delay at the beginning of the year and an eight week delay at the end of the year is simply not an acceptable time frame for our university graduates who are enthusiastically looking forward to commence repaying their HEX Debt and getting on with their lives in their chosen profession.

Many of those I have spoken to who are commencing their Intern Year are anxious about speaking out for fear of upsetting AHPRA and perhaps suffering repercussions later. Whilst I am sure this would not happen, I can understand their reluctance to speak out. Please be assured that there are strong feelings amongst this group as well.

I am also aware that there are several pharmacists, including myself, who had to cancel planned holidays because of the unexpected longer time frame when anticipating that an Intern who had worked for them for twelve months would be registered shortly after completing the requirements for registration.

Thanks for receiving this submission. I trust that the system will be revised and corrected as a result of this Inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Tony Lawler B Pharm
13th April 2011