

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Inquiry into Factors affecting the Supply of Health Services and medical Professionals in
Rural Areas

11 May 2012

Question no: 3

OUTCOME 12: Health Workforce Capacity

Topic: Ten year moratorium

Hansard Page: 72

Senator Moore asked:

Can you give us some indication of when the 10-year moratorium came in, how it works and just some indication about policy in that direction?

Answer:

The ten year moratorium requirement under section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* (the Act) was introduced on 1 January 1997.

The ten year moratorium requirement places a restriction on the eligibility of two groups of medical practitioners registered in Australia after 1 January 1997 to provide medical services that are subsidised by Medicare rebates. These medical practitioners are:

- Overseas trained doctors (OTDs): medical practitioners who did not obtain their primary medical training at an Australian Medical Council (AMC) accredited medical school in Australia or New Zealand; and
- Foreign graduates of an accredited medical school (FGAMS): medical practitioners who obtained their primary medical training at an AMC accredited medical school and who were not permanent residents or citizens of Australia or New Zealand at the time of commencing their medical training.

The restriction is referred to as the ten year moratorium requirement as it is applied to OTDs and FGAMS for a period of generally ten years from the date of the medical practitioner's first Australian medical registration.

OTDs and FGAMS may be granted approval to access the Medicare benefits arrangements for their medical services prior to completing the ten year moratorium requirement. Such approval may be granted if the medical practitioner holds an exemption under section 19AB of the Act.

The Section 19AB Guidelines provide the conditions under which an OTD or FGAMS may be granted a section 19AB exemption by the Department. The primary consideration for the

Department when assessing an exemption application is whether an OTD or FGAMS is seeking to practise within a District of Workforce Shortage (DWS) for their medical specialty.

A DWS is broadly defined as a geographical area that has less access to medical services than the national average. DWS areas for each medical specialty are determined by the Department using the latest Medicare billing statistics and population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The ten year moratorium requirement under section 19AB of the Act seeks to increase the availability of Medicare subsidised medical services within areas of greatest need, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas by providing a mechanism to allow OTDs and FGAMS to obtain a Medicare provider number within DWS areas. The moratorium continues to function as a key mechanism for ensuring a more equitable distribution of the Australian medical workforce.