

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, 23 February 2011 2:46 PM
To: Committee, HAA (REPS)
Subject: Inquiry into Registration Processes and Support for overseas Trained Doctors

[REDACTED]

To,
The Secretary of the Committee (inquiries and reports)

<p><u>Submission No. 102</u> (Overseas Trained Doctors) Date: 23/02/2011</p>

Dear Sir/ Madam



Re: Inquiry into Registration Processes and Support for overseas Trained Doctors

My name is Ponraja Thuryrajah. I am a medical practitioner whom was trained in the University of Kashmir India, graduating with an MBBS Degree in December 1976. I am writing to detail the problems I have encountered in achieving medical registration in Australia across the course of the past two decades. These problems are multifactorial, stemming from what I perceive as systemic inefficiency and recalcitrant bureaucracy, but I believe may be remedied in due course with help from The Committee. The odyssey has proven to be expensive in time and in money, and is a significant source of stress and frustration.

I have enclosed all relevant documents as pdf files. I pray and hope that my family's and my quandry will be given due consideration by the House Standing Committee, and hopefully result in a solution for my degree verification issue.

The problems are summarised as follows:

- 1. I am required to re-verify my medical degree with the AMC, despite having been recognised earlier. This has resulted in me not being able to practice, where I was able to earlier.*
- 2. Re-verification with the AMC is contingent upon communication with the University of Kashmir, which is currently*

unable to provide verification due to internal problems.

I have not been provided any other recourse.

3. *A lack of government sponsorship towards third-party agencies in conducting courses for achieving Australian accreditation for AMC and RACGP is a lost opportunity that was once implemented in the past, and may maintain required checks and balances to Australian Government standards, without direct involvement of the medical agencies.*

1. Requirement to re-verify a previously-verified degree

Between the years 1991 and 1993, I had applied for registration in Australia through the Australian Medical Council and after undergoing a strenuous vetting, my degree was given recognition. I was then required to complete the Australian Medical Council Exam, which is a two-part examination. I had passed the AMC Part 1 examination (multiple choice questions), but could not appear for the AMC Part 2 examination (viva examination) due to financial constraints and familial responsibilities at the time.

On the basis of having passed the AMC part 1 exam, I was allowed to work in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for nearly 3 years between the years 2004 and 2007, and had been granted provisional registration by the West Australian Medical Board on an annual basis.

With the advent of new laws circa 2008, legislation required that overseas medical degrees be re-verified before continuing practice. I was asked by the Australian Medical Council to re-apply for verification of my degree from Kashmir, despite the fact that I had previously been assessed, verified and granted registration with AMC thereby allowing me to work as a GP in the Outer Metro area of Perth at that time.

Since new legislations required me to do so, I submitted the application to AMC, for ECFMG (the Educational Committee for Foreign Medical Graduates) to contact the University of Kashmir to verify my degree. I was informed that the AMC will contact myself directly regarding progress of the application.

2. Inability to re-verify degree due to external circumstances, and not being provided other avenues

It has now been nearly 3 years since my application to AMC to re-verify my degree, with no progress. Information from the AMC was also not forthcoming without repeated inquiry. Later replies to inquiries were met with a stock reply that they (ECFMG and AMC) are still awaiting for the University of Kashmir to reply. Since Kashmir University is not replying, I am unable to continue employment as a doctor in Australia, despite the fact that I had worked previously as a General Practitioner without any mishap. I decided to focus my energies on expediting communication between the University of Kashmir and the AMC by contacting the University directly. I did contact the University via telephone, and was informed that the University had been subjected to an arson attack circa 1983, and all records of students graduating prior to that year had been destroyed. This was subsequently confirmed by an American website which I downloaded and sent to AMC.

In order to re-instate records of my degree, I was directed to contact the Controller of Examinations of the University, whom subsequently referred me to the Registrar of the University of Kashmir. He sent me an e-mail requesting that I submit the original copy of my medical degree by post addressed to himself, and stated that they (the University) will then reply to ECFMG.

Considering the manifest political unrest and resultant inefficiency of services in the Kashmir region, I was reluctant to post my degree certificate. I had offered to submit a true certified copy, which was declined. The only other recourse presented was for a personal presentation of the degree in the offices of the University itself to be sighted and verified by the authorities as genuine. However, Kashmir is still a war zone with combatants not above kidnapping for ransom. In the 1990s, this culminated with the murder of the University's Vice Chancellor. Knowledge of this turmoil, as well as advisory warnings from the government website smartraveller.gov.au precluded my travelling to this region, as I felt it would be a significant danger to my life and safety.

Despite having communicated to the AMC regarding these privations, they remained immovable on their position that required verification via the ECFMG (which is hitherto impossible). It is likely that this problem arose because the Australian legislation on the matter has precluded any sort of flexibility.

The lack of verification by the AMC had cost me a new opportunity offered to me in Melbourne as a practitioner within a GP organisation. I am now not employed in any capacity.

3. Lack of government funding towards third-party guidance in certification exams

With regards to appearing for exams, I have appeared many times for both the AMC part 2 exams and the RACGP exams but have been unsuccessful in my attempts in the past decade. As these exams have been self-funded, each unsuccessful attempt has proven to be expensive fiscally as well as in effort. The only exam that I managed to pass was the AMC MCQ exam, and this I feel was due to the

fact that a proper course funded by the Australian Government run by the management consultant Ms Margaret Pugliese had provided proper guidance to the candidates.

It is also interesting to note that the course conducted by [REDACTED], with the cooperation of hospital doctors and professors, yielded good pass rates.

Therefore, I would think the Australian Government should again actively fund courses towards the AMC examinations and RACGP examinations via a third party agency. Retrieval of payments for the same from the candidate doctors should commence on passing and being gainfully employed (similar to the HECS system for tertiary education) in staggered payments.

Perhaps courses similar to that conducted by Ms Pugliese could again be tendered out to eligible contractors as per university courses, and hopefully yield better results due to checks and balances whilst at the same time easing the financial burden of the unemployed doctors and their families.

In short, the problems I am facing in gaining employment in Australia are due to legislative practice vitiating prior recognition of my degree, complicated with an inability to re-verify my degree due to external circumstances beyond my control. Further problems with regards to examination certification also stem from a lack of government-funded independent guidance for training overseas-trained doctors for certification to enable them within the workforce.

I hope that this email and the documents included herein will be adequate for the purposes of the Committee in assisting me with my problem. My contact details are at the bottom of this email. Please do not hesitate to contact me via any avenue if any further information is required.

Thank you,

Dr Ponraja Thuryrajah

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