

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES – 24 FEBRUARY 2011 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Deregistration of Doctors

Question reference number: HS 25

Senator: Fierravanti-Wells

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Question:

- a) **Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS** - The other evening we talked about figures of five to 10 per cent in terms of a normal figure, if I can put it that way.

Ms Kruse, is that an accurate assessment?

Ms Kruse - I would not like to say. All I can say is that, at this stage, we could get the figures for you.

- b) **Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS** - Please take them on notice. In that case, can you give me some statistics in relation to the normal processes of deregistration that happen in the normal course of events, and the figures that have occurred since July so that we can make a comparison?

Ms Golightly - Yes. We can take it on notice, but my information is that we have not experienced any increase....

- c) **Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS** - You cannot tell how much of what is happening at the moment. You said to me before that you cannot say that it is one way or the other. My point is that obviously patients and persons who are entitled to a Medicare rebate for a particular service are inconvenienced as a consequence of a registration issue. How do you, in the normal course of events, deal with that person?

Ms Golightly - As it is a normal course of events, I will take on notice what our normal script is. The medical professional could have been deregistered for any reason, including choosing, themselves, not to register. I will take on notice what our normal script and advice is that we give over the counter....

- d) **Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS** - Have you contacted some practitioners or medical professionals as a consequence of the problems with AHPRA?

Ms Golightly - What we mentioned before is that as AHPRA lets us know, we let the medical professionals know. I am also aware that AHPRA has been contacting medical professionals as well.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS - So it is only after AHPRA has contacted them as well?

Ms Kruse - No. AHPRA send the information to us. As soon as we receive that information we send a letter immediately and we call them twice.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS - Did you not just say that in this instance AHPRA has also been doing it?

Ms Golightly - I can check, but that is what we do.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS - As a consequence of this?

Ms Golightly - No. I think it is the normal part of its business of letting people know how to register.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS - Have you had some contact with practitioners in relation to concerns around the registration? Can you put a figure on that, or is it anecdotal?

Ms Golightly - We can check, but I am not aware that any have contacted us with concerns.

Answer:

a) and b)

The normal process for the de-registration of a health professional by Medicare Australia commences when notification is received from either the relevant State/Territory Board or the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). In each circumstance Medicare Australia is obligated to accept and action the notifications.

When Medicare Australia is advised by AHPRA or a relevant State/Territory Board that a health professional has not renewed their registration Medicare Australia processes the deregistration and both writes to and telephones the health professional advising them that their access to Medicare benefits had ceased and the date that this came into effect. Deregistration could occur for a range of reasons, including voluntarily choosing not to renew. The reason for the de-registration is not made known to Medicare Australia.

The following table shows the de-registrations, re-registrations and non-renewal of health professionals for the financial years 2008-09, 2009-10 and 1 July 2010 to 28 February 2011.

Financial Year	De-registrations	Re-registrations	Non-renewal
2008-2009	11,235	5,579	5,656
2009-2010	10,955	4,903	6,052
2010-2011 YTD	10,385	5,457	4,928

The figures for the financial years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 are for the State/Territory-based boards, whilst the figures for 2010-2011 are for both AHPRA and those professions who are still State/Territory based.

The figures for de-registration represent those health professionals who did not renew their registration before the renewal date and were de-registered by the relevant board.

The figures for re-registration represent those health professionals who renewed their registration after a period of de-registration.

The figures for non-renewal represent those health professionals who, for a variety of reasons, choose not to renew their registration with the relevant board. These health professionals may subsequently renew their registration at a later period in time.

Further information on the overall levels of registration activity across the different health professions and States can be found at www.ahpra.gov.au.

- c) Where a patient presents a claim to Medicare Australia and Medicare Australia is unable to process the claim, including because the provider has been de-registered, claimants are referred back to the provider.
- d) As noted on the AHPRA website on 11 February 2011, in an article titled "Update on lapsed registrants", AHPRA contacts health professionals prior to their registration expiry date.

Medicare Australia has a dedicated provider number, 132 150, which is used for all provider related enquiries. Medicare Australia does not record the particular reason for calls and is unable to identify if any of these enquiries are related to provider de-registration.