

Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme

Coalition Senators' Minority Report

Overall, Coalition Senators accept that there are significant advantages to the concept of a national registration and accreditation regime for Australia's health professions. It is curious, even bizarre, that an Australian trained doctor should be able to practise in New South Wales and not automatically in Queensland as well. As such, Coalition Senators support the thrust of the majority report which endorses but seeks some modifications to this scheme.

The scheme's success, however, will depend very much on its implementation. This should be undertaken carefully, with full and transparent consultation with the affected professions, and with a clear eye on the maintenance of Australia's world-envied practice standards.

Mandatory Reporting

Coalition Senators note that mandatory reporting is now a regime commonly applied in a number of areas of public policy, e.g. among health and education workers who detect instances of child abuse.

Coalition Senators are not however convinced that such a regime is necessary to deal with cases of malpractice or misbehaviour which come to the attention of other health professionals. Such professionals will tend to be highly educated and trained individuals, well steeped in the values of their particular occupational group. It strikes the Committee as highly unlikely that such professionals would knowingly avoid disclosure to higher authorities of serious shortcomings among their peers where such disclosure would serve to address that malpractice or misbehaviour.

Put another way, if health professionals cannot be trusted to protect the public by appropriate reporting of serious shortcomings by other professionals, how can they be expected to protect the health and well-being generally of the public they deal with?

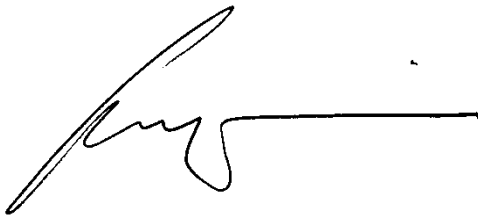
Noting that mandatory reporting provisions only appeared late in the drafting process around Bill B, some doubts must exist as to whether this regime has been properly explored and consulted about by the Bill's drafters.

Recommendation 1

Coalition Senators recommend that the provisions in Bill B dealing with mandatory reporting of professional misconduct be withdrawn, and that consultation begin immediately with stakeholder representative bodies on a code of conduct as an alternative device to ensure professional misconduct is identified and eradicated.

Senator Sue Boyce
Senator for Queensland

Senator Judith Adams
Senator for Western Australia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Senator Gary Humphries
Senator for the ACT