



ACPSEM

Australasian College of Physical Scientists and Engineers in Medicine

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Robert Fitzgerald
Commissioner
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616

Dear Commissioner Fitzgerald,

RE: HEALTH WORKFORCE STUDY

The Australasian College of Physical Scientists and Engineers in Medicine (ACPSEM) incorporates the professional activities of medical physicists, biomedical engineers and physical scientists in medicine. ACPSEM currently provides post-graduate accreditation for Medical Physics experts in Radiation Oncology, Radiology, Radiation Protection and Nuclear Medicine.

The professional activities of our members provide an essential component for many aspects of quality in health care, particularly in the use of radiation. There is a need for an infrastructure of these competent professionals in medicine who are able to establish, implement and monitor a wide range of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures in health. The aim is to ensure optimal quality of care and safe practice for patients, staff and general public.

Without properly trained and accredited Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering professionals as part of the health workforce, there is a potential for:

- Accidents
- Incorrect dosages
- Injury to patients
- Injury to workers and

- Inferior quality service.

ACPSEM has medical physics specialist groups who are experts in quality and safe practices in Radiotherapy, Radiology, Radiation Protection and Nuclear Medicine. We also have world-recognised experts in the physical sciences and biomedical engineering health areas who will support the progress of these areas towards accredited postgraduate specialist programs also. Some examples of these latter areas are those who apply their clinical expertise to neurophysiology, cardiology, pulmonary physiology, ultrasound, rehabilitation engineering, clinical engineering, etc. Our members have in the past provided significant contributions and support to Government Departments and Working Parties in these aspects of safety and quality of health care.

The Commonwealth Government is to be congratulated for its recent initiatives to reduce the high attrition and improve the entry rate of Medical Physicists in Radiation Oncology (the Baume Report). ACPSEM believes similar efforts for medical physicists and biomedical engineers are also required in the areas detailed above in order to ensure the foundations of a high quality health infrastructure is established across the board.

The USA recently announced that it requires 250 trained medical physicists to fill newly created positions in that country. ACPSEM fears that quite a few of Australia's well trained Medical Physics and Engineering workforce will continue to be lured to the USA (as well as elsewhere), where significantly higher salaries are available in a very competitive shortfall market. ACPSEM believes that the current shortage of adequately trained professionals within Australia will worsen if the Australian Authorities neglect National training, salary and other retention strategies.

In order to attract suitably qualified and experienced overseas medical physics and engineering professionals to Australia, ACPSEM approached the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. ACPSEM requested that Medical Physicists be placed on the list of Migration Occupations in Demand.

Improved safety in quality and health Care for Radiation Oncology treatment was proposed through recommendation 65 of the Radiation Oncology Inquiry (Baume) report where it stated that "*All medical physicists should be vocationally registered with the Health Insurance Commission for funding purposes by 2004*". By pursuing a nationally enforced registration of medical physicists (that would require appropriate training, qualifications and accreditation) a system would be implemented that requires and enforces adequate standards of training and qualification as a basic component in delivering appropriate safety and quality measures in health care. The same rationale is required for the other ACPSEM professions.

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) is also involved in quality through its National Regulatory responsibility for radiation safety standards and the reporting of radiation incidents. ACPSEM has key representatives

working on the ARPANSA Codes of Practice and accompanying Safety Guidelines. These new National documents are close to final preparation for Radiotherapy, Radiology, Nuclear Medicine and Radiation Protection. It is intended that the ARPANSA Codes would then become a 'template' for the State Regulatory Bodies to use.

ACPSEM is also a joint member of the Tripartite Committee with the RANZCR and AIR. This committee established a Government funded Working Party to develop the standards for a Radiation Treatment Services Quality Program (the 'Quality Program') in Australia. This Quality Program will form the basis of accreditation for radiation treatment services provided by radiation oncology departments and practices within the framework of an integrated cancer services accreditation program. The Quality Program will include a risk management strategy and will be consistent with patient safety frameworks.

ACPSEM seeks support from the Health Workforce study to:

- assist in improving the training and education for the medical physics, biomedical engineering and physical science specialties within its activities,
- implement a requirement for registration in each of these specialist groups,
- ensure that there is adequate medical physics input to any initiatives involving the use of radiation or other forms of relevant scientific instrumentation in health, and
- ensure that there are adequate numbers of ACPSEM professionals in the Australian health care system and its infrastructure.

I would be pleased to provide any further information or advice on this submission.

Sincerely



A/Professor Lyn Oliver MSc PhD MACPSEM FAIP
President
ACPSEM