

Submission by the Australian Pharmacy Examining Council Inc

on

Australia's Health Workforce Productivity Commission Position Paper

Background

The recognition of overseas trained health professionals was considered as part of a parliamentary enquiry in the late 1960's and as a result of that report the Expert Panel in Pharmacy was formed under the auspices of the Government to assist overseas trained pharmacists to obtain registration in Australia and thus enable them to practise their profession in Australia. An initial examination procedure was developed in conjunction with the state and territory pharmacy registering authorities whilst the last stage of the examination procedure the province of the individual registering authorities.

The Australian Pharmacy Examining Council Inc subsumed the activities of the Expert Panel in the early 1980's and developed a complete examination process which was agreed to by all the pharmacy registering authorities. This ensured national consistency in the assessment of the competency of overseas trained pharmacists.

APEC comprises nominees from each Australian state and territory registering authority, the Committee of Heads of Pharmacy Schools of Australian and New Zealand (CHPS[ANZ]), the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) and the Council of Pharmacy Registering Authorities (COPRA).

In July 1999 APEC was listed as the skills assessing authority for hospital and retail pharmacists under the Migration Act and pharmacy is currently a profession which is listed on the Migration Occupation in Demand List (MODL).

APEC plans to merge with the national pharmacy body, the Council of Pharmacy Registering Authorities (COPRA) in 2006 and will become a standing committee of that body once the merge occurs.

Recognition and Examination Processes

The APEC examination process consists of an eligibility assessment, an English test, a Stage I Examination (multiple choice), a period of supervised practice and a Stage II Examination (clinical).

The APEC examination process tests the competency of the applicant to practise contemporary pharmacy in Australia and there are very few applicants who are not eligible to enter the APEC examination process. Once eligible the applicant must demonstrate their theoretical and clinical knowledge of pharmacy and be tested at

the level of an Australian pharmacist. The pass mark for any APEC examination is determined predominantly by practising pharmacists through question validation and the standard required in the examinations is no more than would be expected of a practising Australian pharmacist.

Under current reciprocal arrangements with Ireland, the United Kingdom and New Zealand pharmacists who trained in those countries and are registered to practise in those countries are not required to complete the APEC examination process, but are required to undertake a period of supervised practice in Australia (usually four weeks) and to be familiar with Australian drug laws.

from late 2006 APEC will be offering a two stream process. The first stream will remain unchanged from the current examination process.

The second stream will offer a shorter process to pharmacists who hold a pharmacy qualification from a recognised accredited institution in a country which has a standard of practice which is substantially equivalent to Australia. This will include institutions from countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and the United States. This list will be expanded as further accreditation processes are recognised.

Candidates entering through the second stream will be required to complete a competency based written examination (offered overseas and in Australia), a minimum period of supervised practice (not less than four weeks) and a national forensic examination.

Since 1981 over 600 overseas trained pharmacists have completed the APEC process and have been registered to practise pharmacy in Australia and many are in full time work in community, hospital or industry practice.

Summary

As in most countries, the practise of a profession in Australia requires evidence of an appropriate level of education and experience. Pharmacy education differs around the world both in quality and training and pharmacy delivery varies enormously in different countries. The practise of pharmacy in Australia in health care is unique and practising pharmacists in Australia must be competent at the level the Australian community expects.

The APEC process is seen as transparent and rigorous while being fair and equitable. Assessments to determine whether an applicant is eligible to undertake the examination process are done on an individual basis and APEC has very few issues of non-recognition of overseas trained pharmacists.