



MEDIA RELEASE
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UN CASE VINDICATES AMC

A United Nations racial discrimination committee has vindicated the independence, fairness and integrity of the Australian Medical Council.

The United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in Geneva, investigated a complaint against the AMC and the Australian Government, lodged by a disaffected AMC candidate who has sat and failed the AMC examination four times.

The AMC is an independent national standards body established by Australia's Health Ministers in 1984 to assess the competence and knowledge of overseas trained doctors, and to accredit the standards of Australian and New Zealand Medical Schools.

The CERD is the peak international body dealing with racial discrimination. It operates under the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The candidate lodged the complaint against both the AMC and the Australian Government. However, the Committee found:

- The existence of the examination does not constitute racial discrimination.
- The requirement to pass the AMC examination to ensure a candidate is safe to provide care to patients in Australia does not violate the right to work or the free choice of employment.
- There was no evidence to support the candidate's claim of victimisation by the AMC.

AMC President, Dr Kerry Breen, said the UN decision vindicated the integrity of the processes and examinations of the AMC.

"I am delighted that such a respected and independent body as the United Nations has confirmed what the AMC has been saying for many years: that the AMC is interested in standards and not race," Dr Breen said.

Overseas trained doctors bring a rich diversity of cultural understanding and experience to the health care system in Australia. Over 2700 graduates of a range of medical schools in more than 100 countries of training have sat and passed the AMC examination in the last 20 years. The age of candidates varies from 25 to 65, with an average age of 35 years. The AMC exam has an overall pass rate of 49%, which is comparable with pass rates in other international examinations such as the Canadian licensing examinations.

"The purpose of the AMC examination is to provide overseas trained doctors with an opportunity to demonstrate that they have the appropriate levels of medical knowledge and clinical skills for registration in Australia. As part of the registration process the AMC examinations help to ensure that Australians can be confident that

any doctor registered to practise can provide safe medical care to the Australian community,” Dr Breen said.

The AMC examination tests doctors across a range of both common and important medical conditions for the Australian community.

Dr Breen said the AMC did not test for obscure medical knowledge, but aimed to ensure that successful candidates would be able to provide safe clinical care.

The examination has highlighted the following problem areas for many overseas trained doctors:

- Women’s health issues, including diagnosis of cervical cancer, hormone replacement therapy, breast feeding and treatment of migraine and complications in childbirth.
- General issues, including failure to identify the clinical signs of bone cancer, failure to identify the clinical signs of heart disease, psychiatric illness, complications of anti-depressant therapy and clinical signs of potential meningitis and related conditions.

“It is unfortunate that public debate about the AMC has focused on equity and social justice issues relating to individual candidates, when the real issue is the effectiveness of the AMC’s ability to screen candidates to ensure they can provide safe medical care for Australians,” Dr Breen said.

“If the AMC fails to properly assess candidates, if it relaxes its standards and does not require doctors to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the health needs of Australians, then some patients will inevitably pay for this approach with their health or worse, their lives,” he said.

Ends.

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