

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Assessment of Applications for Recognition of Medical Specialties

The Australian Medical Council (AMC) manages a process for assessing applications for the recognition of medical specialties and sub-specialties. Recognition through this process signifies that a medical specialty or sub-specialty is developing in Australia in response to a demonstrable need for specialist medical services and that its development is in the best interests of the Australian community.

This recognition process results in advice to the Minister for Health and Ageing to assist in deciding which medical specialties will be recognised for the purposes of being listed in Schedule 4 of the Health Insurance Regulations, 1975 (*Health Insurance Act 1973(Cth)*). The process managed by the AMC also provides for applicants seeking recognition for other purposes. For example, organisations may wish to have specialist medical skills and knowledge acknowledged, and the education and training programs that lead to these attributes accepted as the standard for a particular area of practice without seeking recognition for the purposes of the Health Insurance Act. Recognition of such specialties results in inclusion in a separate list of Australian Recognised Medical Specialties, maintained by the AMC.

The Purpose and Structure of this Report

The Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians has sought the recognition of sexual health medicine as a medical specialty in Australia.

This report and its findings – as formally adopted by the Recognition of Medical Specialties Advisory Committee - is an assessment carried out by an AMC recognition review group of the case for and against recognition against criteria established in the Guidelines for Recognition, *The Recognition of Medical Specialties and Sub-specialties*. These are:

- Criterion I that the recognition of sexual health medicine as a medical specialty would improve the safety of health care;
- Criterion II that the recognition of sexual health medicine as a medical specialty would improve the standards of health care;
- Criterion III that the recognition of sexual health medicine would be a wise use of health resources.

These criteria are, in turn, broken down into a series of sub-criteria, against which specific claims of the applicant body are tested. These sub-criteria are found in the Guidelines and at the head of each relevant section of the report.

Assessment of the Application by the Australian Medical Council

An application from the Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine (the Chapter) for the recognition of sexual health medicine as a medical specialty was first submitted to the AMC on 30 January 2006. The Recognition of Medical Specialties Advisory Committee (the Committee) first considered the suitability of the application for assessment at its March 2006 meeting but did not judge it suitable for full assessment until June 2006 following the submission of further information by the Chapter.

The review group first convened in November 2006 to consider the application and to plan a program of assessment. In February and March 2007 it undertook a program of clinical site visits. This program took in a broad range of sites in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns and Darwin. Upon completion of this program, the review group found it necessary to seek extra information from the Chapter to clarify a number of incongruencies in the original submission. A list of questions was drafted and sent to the Chapter. The Chapter submitted its detailed response to the AMC in May 2007.

In the same month, the review group held a stakeholder forum in which organisations with an identified professional interest in the application were invited to provide oral submissions. The organisations represented at this forum were:

- the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- the Australasian College of Dermatologists
- the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases
- the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine
- the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine
- the National Centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research
- the Australasian Sexual Health Nurses Association

Following the stakeholder forum, the Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine was invited to present final oral submissions to the full review group on the case for recognition. Following this, the review group met for the final time to arrive at a consensus on the application before retiring to prepare its assessment report.

The Recognition of Medical Specialties Advisory Committee considered the review group's assessment report and findings at its June 2007 meeting. Comments by the Chapter on the report were also tabled. The Committee formally endorsed the report and prepared its recommendations to the Council.

Comment on the Report Findings

In producing its assessment report, the review group drew upon information from the written and oral submissions of the applicant body, the published literature, public submissions, and information gathered from stakeholder consultations and the program of clinical site visits.

The case for recognition against the three criteria (and associated sub-criteria) is presented in *Sections 4, 5 and 6* of this report respectively. ***The review group's findings are to be found at the conclusion of each section.***

The review group has endeavoured to support its arguments with the best available evidence. Where anecdotal evidence is used, it is identified as such and utilised in an illustrative rather than demonstrative manner.