



# THE RAMAZZINI PRESENTATION

## IMPACT OF COMPLAINTS ON OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PHYSICIANS WORKING IN NEW ZEALAND

DR. MICHAEL AUSTEN - AFOEM STAGE C TRAINEE

MAY 8 2017 – RACP CONGRESS - MELBOURNE

# RATIONALE

- Occupational and Environmental Physicians (OEPs) in New Zealand (NZ) appear to be over-represented in complaints made to the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC) and the New Zealand Medical Council (NZMC)
- There is limited NZ literature about complaints regarding health practitioners
- There is no published research about complaints experienced by NZ OEPs

# OBJECTIVE

- Explore the impact of complaints on OEPs:
  - Who received complaints?
  - Issues leading to a complaint
  - Acute and long term effects on OEPs
  - How OEPs reflected on their complaints

# METHOD

- Qualitative research with thematic analysis
- Sufficient in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to achieve thematic saturation (i.e. no new themes)
- Ethical approval
- After consent had been obtained, participants were invited to discuss their experiences with complaints
- Interviews were recorded, anonymised, transcribed, coded and analysed for themes

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION - 1

- Interviewed 15 of 59 OEPs who were practising in NZ as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016:
  - Male and female participants
  - Geographical spread throughout NZ
  - Interviews lasted between 0.5 and 2.5 hours each
- Thank you to participants

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION - 2

- Themes (for almost everyone):
  - Everyone gets complaints
  - Complaints can arise and arrive at any time
  - Complaints cause a strong emotional response
  - Participants took actions to avoid, mitigate and deal with complaints
  - Participants didn't talk to their OEP colleagues when dealing with complaints

# EVERYONE GETS COMPLAINTS

*“Look, you know, if ever we start charging you on a usage basis you guys will be in trouble because you’re the highest frequency of users we get.”*

– Paraphrased by Participant D from a discussion with an Indemnity Insurer

- Most do not get formalised to HDC or NZMC
- Most are dealt with by the OEP with the assistance of the indemnity insurer

# COMPLAINTS CAN ARISE AND ARRIVE AT ANY TIME

- Complaints can arise from every aspect of the assessment
  - Waiting room/History-taking/Examination/Report/Decision

*“The question is really where do the complaints come from - often you think you can predict.”*

– Participant J

- Complaints are seldom predictable
  - Assessment/Time



# COMPLAINTS CAUSE A STRONG EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

*“...it would [have] helped me to have [had] somebody available that night when I was too nauseated to eat, to speak with and to talk [to] and to feel in a secure trusted non-threatening environment...”*

– Participant E on the day he received a complaint

- Who do you turn to?

# WE TAKE ACTIONS TO AVOID, MITIGATE AND DEAL WITH COMPLAINTS

- Can we avoid all complaints?

*“It’s a volume game... like rolling dice.”*

- Participant G

*“But I don’t know that they focus too much on avoiding complaints or managing yourself in those situations.”*

- Participant C

- Can we mitigate complaints and what do we do once we receive one?

## WE DON'T TALK TO OUR COLLEAGUES WHEN DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

*“At the moment I think we are closed about them and we don't want people to know about them so we don't talk about them and if the opposite was true it might make them a little less scary.”*

-Participant N

*“...had there been a colleague, I still would have been reluctant because I have heard of cases where one doctor would then talk with somebody else and say well this sounds to me you know, is he safe to practice?”*

- Participant X

# STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Qualitative not quantitative approach to understanding complaints
- While there is no hypothesis needed, qualitative research can provide a rich depth of information that a quantitative study is unlikely to provide
- Limited numbers but reached saturation (no new themes) - validation
- External validity? This is a New Zealand only study - What is the situation in Australia?

# CONCLUSIONS

- Everybody gets complaints
- Complaints arise from anywhere at any time
- Complaints cause a strong emotional response
- Participants had lots of ideas about avoidance and mitigation
- We don't talk to OEP colleagues when we receive and deal with a complaint

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The Faculty should consider a working group to look at how Trainees and Fellows:

1. Could avoid and mitigate complaints
2. Should be supported when dealing with complaints

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- NZ OEP participants
- Dr John Heydon
- Dr Susan Heydon
- Meagan Stephenson
- Nicola McKendry
- Claire Ultee
- Scott Kirkness