



## RACP COVID-19 Response – as at 08 April 2020

### Advocacy

- In the 6 April 2020 update to its COVID-19 Temporary MBS Telehealth Services factsheet the Department of Health has announced that four new specialist and consultant physician items will be provided with telephone and telehealth equivalent item numbers bringing the total number of physician and paediatrician items covered under telehealth to 13. The new items are 132, 133, 141 and 143. We note that it is still a requirement that the new telehealth services must be bulk billed for patients with health care concession card holders, those patients who are vulnerable to COVID, including those with chronic health conditions and patients under the age of 16. As these categories would comprise a very large proportion of patients seen by College members, we are continuing to advocate to the Department and the Minister our members concerns about the ongoing viability of their practices unless they are able to privately bill.
- The RACP is continuing to advocate for the expansion of telehealth for specialists and is consulting all Division Faculty and Chapters (DFACs) and specialty societies on expansion of telehealth equivalent MBS items for physicians and paediatricians. Based on this consultation collated College feedback on new telehealth and telephone equivalent items was supplied to the Department on 1 April 2020. The College anticipates that additional items will be announced in the coming weeks.
- The College has endorsed the first iteration of world leading 'living guidelines' produced by Cochrane Australia on best care for COVID-19 patients (see RACP resources below). The guidelines will be updated weekly.
- In the media, the RACP has advocated for much needed medical PPE to be conserved for frontline health workers (see RACP resources below). The media release was picked up by 60 radio stations, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Guardian*. The RACP is also advocating for the release of low-risk refugees and asylum seekers from held immigration detention in Australia to protect both themselves and the broader community from the risk of outbreaks in those centres.
- The Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM) Faculty Policy and Advocacy Council (FPAC) along with two additional specialists have formed a Working Group. The group comprises of all AFOEM Members. This group has prepared advice for pregnant health care workers which is currently progressing through the approval process. AFOEM is also preparing FAQs on how health care workers can use PPE effectively. AFOEM will also be preparing advice for members working in health services (on the front line) who may be part of vulnerable groups.
- The AFOEM has published a guideline for their members and employers providing advice on how to deal with COVID-19 issues in the workplace (see RACP resources below).
- The Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine (AChAM) is drafting guidance for members on the delivery of medication assisted treatment of opioid dependence in response to COVID-19.
- The Paediatric and Child Health Division Policy and Advocacy Committee (PPAC) is currently considering issues around the equity of access to telehealth consultations, noting that many paediatric patients and their families do not have adequate access to the internet or devices needed for these consultations.

### Advisory Groups – Education Learning and Assessment

- Second meeting of the Exams Advisory Group was held on 26 March 2020. Based on their recommendations, CEC has approved further postponement of majority of College exams to 2021 and communications circulated advising members of this on 2 April 2020.
- Next Exams Advisory Meeting is scheduled for 8 April 2020 and will focus on contingency arrangements for Faculty exams.
- First meeting of the Training and Accreditation Advisory Group was held on 2 April 2020. A number of changes to program requirements were recommended. These were approved by the CEC on 6 April 2020 and communications are to go out shortly. A number of other program requirement changes are being considered by individual relevant Training Committees.
- A short pulse survey was sent out to trainees to capture their main concerns during this time and get feedback on how the College can best assist them. Over 1,500 responses were received, and results will be published on the RACP website shortly.
- The Directorate is working on proposals for how the Divisional Clinical Exam will be run in 2021 for the 2020 cohort and how provisional progression from BT to AT will work.



## Professional Practice

The College has confirmed the below decisions following regulatory advice from the Medical Council of New Zealand and the Medical Board of Australia:

- All New Zealand Fellows will be exempt from CPD requirements until 28 February 2021. College and MCNZ staff will not be auditing Fellows for CPD compliance until after 1 March 2021.
- The Medical Board in Australia is still encouraging practitioners to continue to do CPD but will not take action if they do not meet CPD requirements when they renew their registration in 2020.
- Fellows with an incomplete 2019 CPD record have been given an automatic extension until 31 July 2020. The CPD Unit will provide additional support to enable Fellows to meet their outstanding 2019 regulatory requirements.

Professional Practice will continue conversations with the Medical Board of Australia on the below:

- Auditing of Fellows' 2019 CPD records. This process would ordinarily commence on 1 April 2020. The College does not intend to undertake its audit process this year.
- The implications of COVID-19 on Overseas Trained Physicians (OTP) in Australia. The OTP Unit is currently providing additional support to both health services and OTPs, as well as expediting applications for those currently in Australia with a job secured (MCNZ handles the OTP assessment process for NZ OTPs).

### Trainees:

- The College Trainee Committee has forwarded a list of trainee concerns to Education, Learning and Assessment and these were considered by the Training and Accreditation Advisory Group, along with the pulse survey results. These are being used to inform a new set of FAQs that will go on the College website.
- Aotearoa New Zealand has responded to a number of trainee enquiries, and we are logging all questions and concerns.

### Meetings:

- Work is commencing with facilitators to adapt the DFAC Councils and Aotearoa New Zealand Committee biennial planning meetings in Q3 2020 to be virtual meetings so that planning can still occur for these peak College bodies.
- The NSW Regions team has successfully delivered two Telehealth webinars, the second of which was delivered to over 700 members and received exemplary feedback. We are continuing to explore how to expand capacity to online events for members more permanently.

## RACP Facilities and staff

- All Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand based staff are now working from home. 145 Macquarie Street is a 'by appointment' access site for essential work only.
- Establishing collaborative employee initiatives to engage and address employee concerns, remote work and employee wellbeing.
- Fortnight calendar (in advance) of wellbeing initiatives launched.
- EAP check-in coordinated for staff considered at high risk of stress/anxiety/workload.
- RACP Support Program developed and launched maximising work contribution for all of workforce and assist those units in need of people resources.
- Working on remote recruitment process and the onboarding of new starters in a total WFH environment.
- On 1 April 2020, the College was advised a team member received a positive test result to COVID-19. The employee had been self-isolating since 24 March 2020. All staff were made aware and risk reduction processes implemented by contacting those who may have come into contact with the team member during a short window of opportunity on 23 March 2020. The isolation period expired on 6 April 2020, and there have not been any other cases reported. The employee has reported to be back to good health.

## RACP Resources

- [College COVID-19 webpage](#)
- [National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce – evidence-based clinical guidelines](#)
- [RACP says face masks must be conserved for frontline health workers \(6 April 2020\)](#)
- [Guidance for occupational physicians providing advice on COVID-19 \(25 March 2020\)](#)