



## RACP COVID-19 Response – as at 01 April 2020

### Advocacy

- Letters and emails to all Australian State and Federal Department of Health contacts and Ministry of Health contacts in Aotearoa New Zealand advising postponement of 2020 Divisional Clinical Exams. We have offered our support to these departments by assisting with direct communication to physicians and paediatricians in Australia and New Zealand as well as trainees in specialty training programs; and including private consultants. We have also emphasised the importance of Government support to our fellows and trainees at the frontline of this health crisis, specifically in relation to Personal Protective Equipment, safety (including hours) and mental health.
- Based on member feedback the two main advocacy issues are:
  - **access to Personal Protective Equipment** - we have received concerning reports that Australian Primary Health Networks, which are responsible for distributing PPE to community practices, have been refusing to provide it to specialists. The RACP issued a [media release](#) calling on the Australian Government to ensure all specialist physicians, as well as GPs, have access to PPE, which was reported in the Herald Sun and the Guardian. We have also raised the issue with the Australian Federal Health Minister's office and the Department of Health on multiple occasions. The Government is aware of the issue and are undertaking urgent measures to source additional PPE, including importation and local manufacture. **This remains a live and urgent issue.**
  - **Expanded access to telehealth** – As of 30 March, the Federal Government's [significant expansion of telehealth items](#) that can be claimed under the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) took effect.

The RACP worked closely with the Department of Health to ensure that the following physician items were included:

- 104 (Specialist. Initial attendance)
  - 105 (Specialist. Subsequent attendance)
  - 110 (Consultant physician. Initial attendance)
  - 116 (Consultant physician. Subsequent attendance)
  - 119 (Consultant physician. Minor attendance)
  - 135 (Paediatrics early intervention services for children with autism, pervasive developmental disorder or disability)
  - 137 (Specialist or consultant physician early intervention services for children with autism, pervasive developmental disorder or disability)
  - 90261 ( Paediatrician, prepare an eating disorder treatment and management plan, more than 45 minutes)
  - 90267 (Paediatrician, to review an eating disorder plan, more than 20 minutes)
- Over the last two days the RACP has worked with Faculties, Chapters, Departments and other Colleges in identifying additional MBS items that can be provided by telehealth, and which will form the basis of a Stage 5 announcement by the Federal Government expected in the next week. These additional MBS items being raised are used by a number of the Faculties and Chapters that haven't been included in the Stage 4 announcement, covering:
    - Group A4 – Consultant Physician attendances to which no other item applies
    - Group A12 – Consultant Occupational Physician Attendances to which no other item applies
    - Group A13 – Public Health Physician Attendances to which no other item applies
    - Group A24 – Pain and Palliative Medicine
    - Group A28 – Geriatric Medicine
    - A31 – Addiction Medicine
    - A32 – Sexual Health Medicine.



The Stage 5 announcement is expected to take place early next week, and there are also active discussions about billing practices, following feedback from members.. There are likely to be further Stage announcements to follow, with the RACP continuing to advocate on members' behalf.

- Discussions are also continuing with Government in relation to billing practices.
- All media releases can be viewed on the [RACP website](#). This provides the most up-to-date summary of our media engagement on this and other matters.
- Our expert reference group has strongly advised against contradicting official public health advice.
- The RACP has been invited to join the DoH's primary care stakeholder group, chaired by Michael Kidd and attended by a small number of peaks including the AMA, RACGP, ACRRM, RDAA and NACCHO. This enables us to raise issues at a senior level on behalf of our members in private and community-based practice.
- Policy & Advocacy continues to manage a large volume of correspondence from members largely about the telehealth items and access to PPE and are keeping them informed about advocacy in this area and new Government policy as it develops.
- 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) and is currently working on advice for the management of vulnerable physicians, including pregnant physicians.
- The Paediatrics and Child Health Division is collating external resources relevant to children and health professionals working with children. Links to relevant resources will be published on the RACP website following the approval of the COVID-19 Expert Reference Group.
- Consulting all Divisions, Faculties and Chapters (DFaCs) and specialty societies on expansion of telehealth equivalent MBS items for physicians and paediatricians

## Advisory Groups – Whole of College

- The College has formed a COVID-19 Expert Clinical Reference Group who meet weekly - a multi-specialty group of members from a range of specialties:  
The Expert Clinical Reference Group advises on:
  - likely forward trajectories of virus spread based on currently understood data and modelling, referring to official Government advice
  - conduct of clinical exams; continuing face-to-face College meetings, member and staff travel on College business
  - Issues the College needs to take up on measures implemented or proposed in response to COVID-19, including advocacy for welfare of members who may be impacted by increased patient load.
  - Any other relevant matters
- 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 to draft: *Guiding Principles for occupational physicians providing advice on COVID-19*. The group comprises of all AFOEM Members
  - This group is now preparing advice to members working in health services who may be part of vulnerable groups, including those who are pregnant.

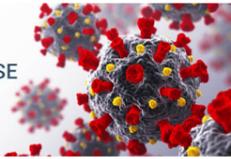
## Advisory Groups – Education Learning and Assessment

Two Advisory groups have been formed to guide Education decision making.

- COVID-19 Examinations Advisory Group providing expert advice on management of examination delivery, making recommendations to the College Education Committee (CEC) and Board and member communications on exams
- COVID-19 Training Operations and Accreditation Advisory Group providing expert advice on training progression, program requirements and accreditation, recommendations to the CEC and member communications regarding training progression and accreditation
  - The following examinations have been postponed:
    - Divisional Clinical Examination for Paediatrics & Child Health and Adult Medicine in Australia and New Zealand
    - AFRM Fellowship Written Examination (General) – Modified Essay Question and MCQ Papers
    - AFRM Fellowship Written Examination (Paediatrics) – Short Answer Question and MCQ Papers
    - AFRM Module 1 Written Assessment
    - AFRM Module 2 Clinical Assessment

## UPDATE

RACP COVID-19 RESPONSE



- Second meeting of the Exams Advisory Group held 26 March and recommendations on training issues going to the College Education Committee. First meeting of Training and Accreditation Advisory Group scheduled for 2 April.
- ELA have held their first meeting with all Health Departments to discuss the impacts of change in examination dates on their annual recruitment processes. Further meetings will be held every few weeks to provide them with updates on the College's decision making and approach and get their feedback.
- Set of Education and Training Principles developed to guide the College's decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide our position on potential impacts to training. This is in line with the approach adopted by several other medical colleges.
- Short Pulse Survey sent out to trainees to capture their main concerns during this time and get feedback on how the College can best assist them.

## Professional Practice

We have confirmed the following decisions on 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.
- All Australian Fellows are exempt from recording 2020 CPD requirements. The Medical Board 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. Professional Practice is currently exploring multiple options to assist Fellows including communication with both regulators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 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 OTPs 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).
- The Executive Committee of the Tri-Nation Alliance postponed the International Medical Symposium until further notice

### Trainees:

- All Basic Trainees and AFRM trainees received personalised notice about exams postponement on Friday 13 March
- Responded to a large number of individual trainee enquiries
- The College Trainee Committee has forwarded a list of trainee concerns to Education, Learning and Assessment and these are being considered by the Training and Accreditation Advisory Group.
- Aotearoa New Zealand has responded to a number of trainee enquiries and we are logging all questions and concerns.

### Meetings:

- The Board made the decision to cancel RACP Congress and postpone Convocation, which were scheduled for May 2020 - the College is looking at ways to facilitate Congress virtually over time
- The Congress Program Committee has endorsed a cut-down 2020 virtual program to be delivered over Q3, Q4 2020 and Q1 2021; projected to commence delivery in June 2020. Any costs will be offset through sponsorship retained for virtual delivery.
- Congress 2021 Lead Fellow appointed
- All face-to-face member meetings have been or are in the process of being cancelled and replaced, where possible with virtual meetings
- Aotearoa NZ Trainees Day scheduled for 4 April cancelled
- Aotearoa New Zealand Accreditation visits for April have been deferred to later in the year.



## RACP Facilities and staff

- Level 19 Governor Macquarie Tower, Sydney (College events space) closed until further notice.
- 145 Macquarie Street, Sydney closed to all members until further notice
- Almost all Australian based staff, and all NZ staff are now working from home using a virtual private network. Office phones are diverted to staff mobiles, or software-based phones able to be answered on College devices at home by RACP staff.
- Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington Office closed for a minimum of 4 weeks from CoB Monday 23 March
- Providing regular updates on evolving situation and support to staff via CEO communications and a staff intranet page
- Directorates have developed business continuity plans to ensure the business can continue to operate under the current circumstances, identifying risks and mitigating actions
- College IT systems have been reviewed against critical functions to ensure they are fully operational and supported to allow core College business to continue working remotely, either with full staff offsite or with a small staff remaining onsite

## RACP Resources

- [College COVID-19 webpage](#)
- [Guidance for occupational physicians providing advice on COVID-19](#) (25 March 2020)
- [Physicians welcome expansion of telehealth](#) (23 March 2020)
- [Physicians call for Telehealth to be expanded to all consultations](#) (20 March 2020)
- [Physicians need access to personal protective equipment](#) (18 March 2020)
- [Physicians welcome Government response package - COVID 19](#) (11 March 2020)