Consideration of possible alternatives to the Medical Council’s current internship requirements for doctors who are eligible for registration by passing the New Zealand Clinical Registration Examination (NZREX)

Introduction

The Medical Council of New Zealand (the Council) is responsible for the registration of all doctors in New Zealand under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCAA). The Council’s principal purpose is to protect the health and safety of members of the public by ensuring that all doctors are competent and fit to practise medicine in New Zealand.

Background

The New Zealand Registration Examination (NZREX) is a clinical examination taken by doctors who do not meet other pathways to registration and want permanent registration in New Zealand. In order for a doctor to sit this examination they must meet the following prerequisites:

- hold a primary medical qualification listed in the AVICENNA directory for medicine; and
- meet the Council’s English language requirements; and
- have passed within the last 5 years the:
  - United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Steps 1 and 2 (Clinical Knowledge), or
  - Australian Medical Council MCQ examination, or
  - Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) test Part 1

In addition, they may not hold New Zealand registration within a special purpose (post-graduate training) scope of practice.

More information about the requirements to sit NZREX can be read online.

Current requirements for NZREX applicants

Currently, a doctor who has sat and passed NZREX, must find suitable employment and is then eligible to apply for provisional general registration (ie registration that allows them to practise under supervision during an intern year). They have two options for completing their intern year (ie their first post-NZREX year):

**Option 1**
Practise under supervision for a minimum of twelve months at intern/first-year house officer level and satisfactorily complete four 3-month runs in a hospital setting as follows:
- 1 category A medical run
- 1 category A surgical run
- 2 other runs which may be A, B or C runs¹.

¹ Runs accredited by the Medical Council of New Zealand, to ensure the doctor’s exposure to a range of medical and surgical areas of medicine
Option 2
Practice under supervision in primary care.

In order to be eligible to work in primary care the applicant must have:
• completed a general intern year elsewhere (ie in another country, in their past practising history); and
• passed NZREX on his or her first attempt; and
• five years or more experience in primary care; and
• similar primary care practice experience (eg general practice vs urgent care); and
• a nominated supervisor that is not also the candidate’s employer.

Once the doctor has satisfactorily completed their provisional general (intern) year under supervision, they are eligible to apply for a full general scope of practice, which will entitle them to work independently and unsupervised. They are required to meet Council’s ongoing recertification requirements either by being formally enrolled in a specialist training programme, or by enrolling in the Council approved recertification programme for general scope doctors (the Inpractice programme, administered by bpac™).

The full NZREX registration policy can be read online.

Alternative under consideration

In 2013 the number of NZREX examinations held per year was increased from four to five. New Zealand medical schools have also been steadily increasing their intake of medical students over the last few years, which has resulted in more New Zealand graduates and a reduction in the number of internship positions available to NZREX applicants. The flow on effect of this is that doctors who have passed NZREX are taking longer to find an appropriate position to enable them to gain provisional general registration to work at intern / house officer level.

The Council is keen to hear from stakeholders whether you believe that Council should consider implementing an additional internship option for NZREX doctors. The alternative under consideration is that Council could permit NZREX doctors to complete an internship within a specific area of medicine (similar to the primary care option described above), based on the doctor’s previous experience.

This option would only be available to doctors who have:
• completed a general intern year elsewhere (ie in another country, in their past practising history); and
• passed NZREX on their first attempt; and
• had 5 years or more comparable, similar experience within the last 10 years as a registered doctor in the specific area of medicine in which they intend to complete their period of supervised practice.

Restrictions and limitations
Council would intend that these doctors would work under supervision in a provisional general scope for one year, and
• they would not be able to provide night cover for their first 3 months of employment; and
• would have to be employed in positions at house officer level; and
• would have a condition imposed limiting their scope of practice appropriately once a general scope is obtained. (For example a doctor with 15 years’ experience in general surgery would be permitted...
to practise under supervision for a year in general surgery. When they apply for a general scope, they would have a condition on their scope of practice limiting them to working only in general surgery.

If the doctor was approved to do their internship in a specific area of medicine, it is proposed that they would have to meet the following criteria in order to be eligible for registration within a general scope of practice:

- practise satisfactorily for a minimum of 12 months in the specific area of medicine; and
- have employment and a nominated supervisor approved by Council. The supervisor must complete supervision reports on a 3-monthly basis; and
- receive satisfactory supervision reports for three runs completed (or 9 months worked) immediately prior to applying for registration within a general scope; and
- have been recommended for registration within a general scope by his or her supervisor; and
- agree to have their subsequent general scope of practice appropriately limited.

Council seeks your opinion

Should successful NZREX applicants for registration in New Zealand be able to complete a one year internship in a specific area of medicine, rather than having to complete a traditional intern year (option 1)?

Request for feedback

Should successful NZREX applicants for registration in New Zealand be able to complete a one year internship in a specific area of medicine, rather than having to complete a traditional intern year? The Council is now seeking feedback on the suggested alternative. In particular, we would also appreciate your answers to the following questions:

1) Would a change such as what is being suggested, appear to reduce, or increase, the risk to patient health and safety? Or does it have no effect either way? If you see increased risks, what are they and how might they be minimised?

2) Does the suggested alternative increase or reduce restrictions or barriers to registration?

Please email your feedback on the suggested option to Anastasia Appleyard, Registration Team Leader by Monday, 21 October 2013 at nzrexconsultation@mcnz.org.nz.

Your comments and submissions will be analysed by Council staff before presentation to the Council for consideration. We also intend publishing a summary and analysis of the responses received (with any details which might identify individual submitters removed).