

Recognising and Assisting Colleagues in Healthcare Challenges



Reading time:
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Managing practitioner wellbeing

Practitioners' well-being has a significant impact on healthcare provision directly impacting patient care, including satisfaction, adherence to treatment and the interpersonal aspects of care. The Medical Board through its code of conduct, has set out specific requirements and expectations in regard to how you should monitor and manage your performance and wellbeing – and that of your colleagues.

Your AHPRA Code of conduct

11.Ensuring doctors health

11.2 Your health

Good medical practice involves:

- 11.2.1 Having a general practitioner.
- 11.2.2 Seeking independent, objective advice when you need medical care, and being aware of the risks of self-diagnosis and self-treatment.
- 11.2.3 Seeking help if you are suffering stress, burnout, anxiety or depression.
- 11.2.4 Making sure that you are immunised against relevant communicable diseases.
- 11.2.5 Not self-prescribing.
- 11.2.6 Recognising the impact of fatigue on your health and your ability to care for patients, and endeavouring to work safe hours wherever possible.
- 11.2.7 Being aware of the doctors' health program in your state or territory which provides confidential advice and support through the doctors' health advisory and referral services.
- 11.2.8 If you know or suspect that you have a health condition or impairment that could adversely affect your judgement, performance or your patient's health:
 - not relying on your own assessment of the risk you pose to patients
 - consulting your doctor about whether, and in what ways, you may need to modify your practice, and following the doctor's advice.

11.3 Other doctors' health

Doctors have a responsibility to assist medical colleagues to maintain good health. Good medical practice involves:

- 11.3.1 Providing doctors who are your patients with the same quality of care you would provide to other patients.
- 11.3.2 Notifying the Medical Board of Australia if you are treating a doctor whose ability to practise is impaired and is placing patients at substantial risk of harm. This is always a professional responsibility and, in some jurisdictions, may be a statutory responsibility under the National Law.
- 11.3.3 Supporting your colleagues and encouraging any of them (whom you are not treating) to seek appropriate help if you believe they may be ill and impaired. If you believe this impairment is putting patients at risk of substantial harm, notify the Medical Board of Australia. It may also be wise to report your concerns to the doctor's employer and seek advice from a doctors' health service or your professional indemnity insurer.
- 11.3.4 Recognising the impact of fatigue on the health of colleagues, including those under your supervision, and facilitating safe working hours wherever possible.

⁴¹ Sections 140–143 of the National Law and Guidelines: Mandatory notifications about registered health practitioners issued by the Medical Board of Australia, available at: www.medicalboard.gov.

How to identify colleagues in difficulty

- Late for work – or often staying later than others
- Skipping breaks
- Calling in sick regularly
- 'Grapevine' comments from other staff
- History of unwell relatives / recent bereavements/ separations
- Unrealistic workload – may reflect financial pressure
- Any clear change from how someone usually behaves – withdrawal/avoidance, change in work habits

If you are concerned, what can you do?

- Approach the practitioner and ask 'Ru ok?' www.ruok.org.au
- If colleague is senior and unapproachable talk to someone senior or your MDO
- Encourage the colleague to seek advice from their supervisor / senior colleagues
- Hospital employee assistance program
- MDOs such as MIPS
- AMA member – Peer Support Service
- Local/State Doctors Health Advisory Program
- In extreme cases/if patient safety is at risk, consider your mandatory notification requirements -discuss with MIPS

Mandatory reporting - notifiable conduct

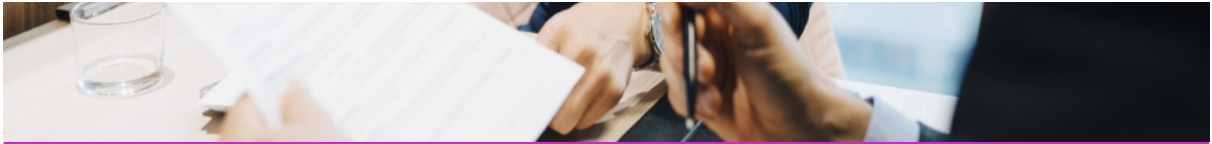
- Practised the practitioner's profession while intoxicated by alcohol or drugs; or
- Engaged in sexual misconduct in connection with the practice of the practitioner's profession; or
- Placed the public at risk of substantial harm in the practitioner's practice of the profession because the practitioner has an impairment; or
- Placed the public at risk of harm because the practitioner has practised the profession in a way that constitutes a significant departure from accepted professional standards.

Resources

[Medical Board Good Medical Practice – a code of conduct for doctors in Australia](#)

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