

## BENEFITS OF DEFINED HEALTH PROFESSIONS

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 All health professions have history and culture, and often represent a discipline of health science with a defined body of knowledge.
- 1.2 The explosion of knowledge within each health field has led, by necessity, to an increased variety of practitioners and increasingly specialised healthcare providers.
- 1.3 Defined health professions offer patients a basis for trust in the competence, knowledge, safety and professionalism of practitioners.
- 1.4 Dentists in Australia have a proud tradition of voluntarily supporting Australian Dental Schools and dental research.
- 1.5 Dentists in Australia have a strong culture of cooperation by sharing experiences and knowledge.
- 1.6 Dentists have a strong culture of philanthropy.
- 1.7 Some social commentators have suggested health professional "silos" should be broken down.

### 2 Principles

- 2.1 Optimal patient outcomes should determine the make up of health professions.
- 2.2 Patients need health providers with clearly defined and readily understood roles and titles to assist them in choosing the correct provider.
- 2.3 Health practitioners belonging to a defined profession and associated disciplines benefit the public as this leads to higher standards of care via:
  - adherence to a code of ethical conduct based on a shared commitment to always give priority to the existential needs and interests of the public they serve above their own;
  - a collegiate environment that encourages sharing of knowledge for the benefit of patients;
  - ongoing information and support from profession-based member organisations to their members;
  - support and mentoring of students and new health providers by their colleagues;
  - providing relevant continuing professional development activities;
  - better focused and supported research;
  - specific indemnity arrangements with patient safety and quality of care feedback loops; and
  - encouragement of volunteer service in Australia and overseas.

- 2.4 A patient-centred approach to health care requires that all health practitioners establish sound referral and communication measures to ensure the overall welfare of the patient remains the key focus.

### **3 Policy**

- 3.1 Clearly defined health professions must remain to ensure:

- optimal health outcomes;
- the advancement of the art and science of each field; and
- patients are provided with a basis for trusting the competence and ethical integrity of practitioners.

- 3.2 The different health professions should work together to:

- ensure a better understanding of each others' knowledge and skills;
- adopt a cooperative and interdisciplinary approach to treating patients where appropriate; and
- promote consistent health messages.

**Policy Statement 2.12**

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