



Media Release

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ACEM welcomes findings of independent report

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) has welcomed the findings of an independent report into allegations of racial bias in one of its Fellowship examinations.

The report by an Expert Advisory Group (EAG), led by Dr Helen Szoke and Professor Ron Paterson, found no evidence of discrimination in the outcome of the 2016.2 Fellowship Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), but identified many areas requiring College attention.

The ACEM Board has accepted the EAG's report in its entirety. In order to do justice to the report the Board will carefully consider and respond to its recommendations. The full report accompanies this statement.

"We have already made substantial changes in many of the areas identified for action and will continue to address the very real concerns that have been raised," said ACEM President, Professor Tony Lawler.

"We recognise that some candidates have been deeply affected by their experience and apologise for the adverse impact it has had on their lives," Professor Lawler said.

ACEM established the EAG and commissioned the report to examine allegations that racial bias in the College's 2016.2 Fellowship Clinical Examination was responsible for a significant performance gap between two broad groups of candidates.

The EAG found while 'there is no statistical evidence of bias to establish that racial bias and discrimination resulted in the significant disparity of outcomes', there was a range of reasons for the difference in results between the two groups.

"We take full responsibility for fixing the problems the College needs to deal with and commit to working with employers and others in the medical profession to address issues that are shared outside our specialty," Professor Lawler said.

"We need to continue to act to rebuild trust and make sure our examination processes are fair, clearly explained and well understood.

"We also have a duty to patients in Australia and New Zealand to ensure that emergency medicine specialists have the skills they need to provide high quality specialist care," Professor Lawler said.

The Deputy Chair of the EAG, Professor Ron Paterson, said the EAG listened carefully to all those who made submissions, to understand their concerns. The EAG also commissioned independent expert analysis, before making recommendations to address the complex problems at the heart of this issue.

"The College did not handle the introduction of the new clinical exam in 2015 well. Intentional examiner bias was not the issue, but a whole range of factors led to a really difficult situation. A group of unsuccessful candidates in the 2016.2 exam have suffered as a result. They are owed an apology and help from the College," Professor Paterson said.

The EAG report notes the work the College has already done to address the combination of complex, historical issues that, combined, gave rise to the issues experienced by the complainants. Continuing work will focus on clear communication, increased transparency, timely and constructive feedback to trainees and education for Fellows about unconscious bias.

ACEM is also undertaking a significant program of work to address discrimination, bullying and harassment in emergency medicine more widely, in common with other specialist colleges and agencies across the health sector.

“We want to make sure our actions effect real change,” Professor Lawler said. “Given the significant overlap with issues identified in the discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment survey, ACEM will develop and publish a comprehensive, integrated Action Plan by February 2018, and will work with Fellows, trainees and other stakeholders to ensure it leads to meaningful change.”

[Download the EAG report](#)

The EAG commissioned [independent statistical and psychometric analysis](#) and a [literature review](#) as part of its investigation.

Background

The eight person EAG included three independent members and five ACEM Fellows or Trainees. The EAG was chaired by Dr Helen Szoke, formerly Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner and federal Race Discrimination Commissioner with the Australian Human Rights Commission. The Deputy Chair was Professor Ron Paterson, former New Zealand Health and Disability Complaints Commissioner and New Zealand Parliamentary Ombudsman.

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ACEM is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for the training and ongoing education of emergency physicians, and for the advancement of professional standards in emergency medicine, in Australia and New Zealand. ACEM, as the peak professional organisation for emergency medicine in Australasia, has a vital interest in ensuring that the highest patient care and emergency department standards.

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