

Question on Notice
No. 701
Asked on 15 October 2013

MR KATTER asked the Minister for Health (MR SPRINGBORG)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the governance framework and employment arrangements for physician assistants that were presented to the Minister several months ago and are ready to be signed off by the Minister to allow the current 30 physician assistants who have graduated from the University of Queensland, to work in the public health service in this State -

Will the Minister give details of when the following documents will be signed (a) application for scope of clinical practice, (b) clinical supervision and practice report, (c) generic physician assistant experienced job description, (d) general physician assistant graduate job description, (e) PA competencies, (f) PA governance guidelines and (g) practice plan?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Mount Isa for his question.

The Blueprint for better healthcare in Queensland identifies that significant reforms are required to ensure that we have a skilled, flexible and productive clinical workforce required to meet the health needs of Queenslanders into the future.

This includes workforce strategies to work in partnership with Hospital and Health Services, private and not for profit health services and other levels of government on health workforce planning. We will improve the effectiveness of clinician training, ensure our highly skilled clinicians can work to their full potential in a flexible industrial environment, and promote advanced and expanded roles.

The Physician Assistant role is a new role to Australia, but a role that has been long established in the USA, and has since been introduced into Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. A Physician Assistant works under the delegation and supervision of a medical practitioner and is commonly known as a doctor extender.

The role was piloted in Queensland in 2009-2010 to test suitability for the Queensland public health system. The evaluation showed a positive contribution to patient outcomes and acceptance by other clinical professions in the three pilot sites at the Princess Alexandra Hospital Brisbane, and the Cooktown and Mt Isa Hospitals.

Since that time, Health Workforce Australia undertook an in-depth study on the Physician Assistant role and the report *The potential role of Physician Assistants in the Australian context 2011* notes evidence of positive impacts on service capacity, particularly in the rural areas.

Following an increasing interest in the engagement of the Physician Assistant role by Queensland Hospital and Health Services, I sought advice regarding the potential for this role in Queensland, the mechanisms required to ensure quality and safety of Physician Assistant Practice, and the inter-relationship of this role to existing clinical professions. This included the impact it may have on the sustainability of the established professions into the future.

The Department of Health has developed a Physician Assistant governance framework to facilitate the utilisation of the Physician Assistant role within Queensland public healthcare system and this will now be made available for the Hospital and Health Services via the Department of Health intranet site.

This framework includes a Physician Assistant clinical governance guideline which outlines the requirements for an approved practice plan, continuing professional development, supervision, and review and reporting. The guideline aligns to other clinical governance frameworks already established and will provide quality safeguards. Physician Assistant employment arrangements and supporting tools such as job description samples have also been developed to support the overarching framework.

The employment of Physician Assistants will be entirely the decision of Hospital and Health Services and will be based on local service and workforce skill mix requirements.