

Specialist Re-entry Program Guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions

Guidelines

Note: The Australian Government Specialist Re-entry Program Application Form and Host Practice Expression of Interest Form should be read in conjunction with these guidelines

Introduction

In November 2003 the Australian Government announced changes to improve Medicare through a package of initiatives that invests more than \$4 billion over five years to 2007 to strengthen and protect Medicare. One initiative was the introduction of a new program to assist qualified medical practitioners who have taken a break from the specialist clinical workforce and wished to re-enter.

The Australian Government Specialist Re-entry Program (SREP) is one of a range of strategies to increase the number of doctors in the workforce in Australia.

Program Outline

The aim of the Specialist Re-entry Program is to provide support to assist medical practitioners to re-enter the workforce following career interruptions. This will assist in alleviating Specialist workforce shortages and will improve patient access to specialty services as qualified practitioners re-enter the workforce.

Re-entering medical practitioners participating in this program will be eligible for three months refresher support including

- a supported clinical placement (where this occurs in a private practice services will attract the Medicare rebate)
- mentor support
- other individually tailored support arrangements negotiated on a case by case basis

Host practices participating in this program will be eligible for financial incentives to assist in facilitating a re-entering medical practitioner's refreshing clinical placement.

The implementation of this program has been designed in consultation with the Specialist Re-entry Program Reference Group which includes representatives from specialist colleges and other stakeholder organisations.

Eligibility

Re-entrants

To be considered **eligible** for the Specialist Re-entry Program the medical practitioner **must**

- Hold Fellowship from a recognised Australian specialist medical college or have been recognised as fully equivalent to an Australian trained specialist, or
- Hold a postgraduate qualification from a recognised specialist medical college, and
- Hold current medical registration in any State or Territory, and
- Intend to return to the specialist medical workforce in Australia, either full-time or part-time.

Host Clinical Placements

To be considered an **eligible** practice

- The clinical placement must indicate a willingness to provide professional support to the re-entering medical practitioner.
- The opportunities within the clinical placement include at least some of those identified in the participating medical practitioner's re-entry plan
- Where the clinical placement occurs in private practice, opportunities should exist to enable the re-entering medical practitioner to provide specialist services including those that will attract a Medicare rebate.

Role of Specialist Colleges

Specialist colleges are involved in the implementation of this program in conjunction with the Department of Health and Ageing, Health Workforce Branch. All recognised specialty areas are eligible for this program.

Specialist colleges will be involved in the Specialist Re-entry Program by providing advice to the Department of Health and Ageing and re-entering medical practitioners and host practices on proposed clinical, mentor and other support arrangements. This involvement may include assisting the medical practitioner's access to the program, assisting applicants in the development of individualised refresher plans, identifying and assisting with arrangements for suitable host practices and mentors and undertaking an assessment process to determine an applicant's suitability to return to the workforce.

The Department of Health and Ageing will provide funds to specialist colleges for the provision of this networking, administrative support and specialised advice. Funds from this Program are also available for participating practices and mentors.

For further information, contact your specialist college, call the Strengthening Medicare information line on **1800 011 163**, or go to **www.health.gov.au**.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is this program in place?

The Specialist Re-entry Program is designed to encourage qualified medical practitioners with a specialist qualification to return to the workforce following a career interruption in that specialty.

Medical practitioners leave the medical workforce for a variety of reasons, to have children, care for a family member, or pursue other interests. Re-entry to any career can be difficult, but it is particularly so for doctors who need to keep up with a constantly changing knowledge base. This program is designed to ensure that the supply of medical practitioners is sustained through access to relevant refresher support.

How long do I need to have been out of the workforce?

There is no minimum or maximum period of time that prevents you from being part of this program. Your needs will be assessed by the relevant specialist college to determine what your refresher requirements might be and whether these needs will be met by a three month refresher program.

Do I need to be a Fellow of a specialist college?

You will need to have attained Fellowship, or hold a postgraduate qualification, from a recognised specialist college, or have been recognised by the college or Specialist Recognition Advisory Committee as being fully equivalent to an Australian trained specialist.

I am a GP Proceduralist with a diploma from a specialist medical college, am I eligible for this program?

Yes you may be eligible. Please call 1800 011 163 for advice. If not, refresher training will still be available. For further information about the availability of GP refresher training in your area go to the GPET website at <http://www.gpet.com.au/>

I am thinking of offering locum services in my speciality, but need some refresher training before I do. Can this program help me?

Yes, if you are a specialist or GP proceduralist with a diploma from a recognised specialist college and are thinking of putting your name on a locum list please contact your specialist college or contact the Strengthening Medicare Information Line on 1800 011 163.

Do I need to hold current registration as a medical practitioner within a state or territory?

Yes, this is essential for practicing medicine in Australia. If your registration has lapsed you must renew your registration before applying for this program.

The information you have provided talks about refresher support. What does this refresher support involve?

Different types of medical practitioners require distinct kinds of refresher support and each medical practitioner has individual needs. The basic model that the program uses is that of mentoring together with other training activities, if required, such as seminars and courses. Involvement in the re-entry program will enable you to develop and undertake your own refresher plan in negotiation with and support from your relevant specialist college.

I live outside a major metropolitan centre – can I still access this program?

Yes, however depending on the location of your refresher practice placement you may be required to spend some time away from home. If this is the case some funds may be available to assist you, for example, travel expenses. Other refresher opportunities may also be available from your home location depending on what your refresher needs are.

Do I need approval from my college to be involved in the program?

Yes the specialist colleges are integral to the Program because they help establish the refresher training program with you and help to provide placements.

How long will this program take?

Refresher support and training will be available for up to three months (not necessarily consecutively).

Are salaries included as part of this program?

Salaries are not included as part of this program. However, it is expected the services provided by re-entering candidates who undertake their clinical placement in a private practice will attract a Medicare rebate. In the public setting the program can be undertaken on return to a salaried position.

Do I need medical indemnity insurance while undertaking re-entry?

Yes. During your refresher program you will be performing professional medical services. You will need to check with the relevant state/territory Medical Board and medical defence insurer to establish your medical indemnity requirements.

I currently work as a medical specialist but in a narrowly defined sub-speciality - will the program assist me to broaden my skills within my specialty?

Assessment of refresher training needs in these situations are made on a case by case basis. Please contact your college to discuss your situation.

I currently work as a medical specialist and wish to return to a sub-speciality - will this program assist me to refresh my skills?

Assessment of refresher training needs in these situations are made on a case by case basis. Please contact your college to discuss your situation.

Will any components of the refresher program form part of any Continuing Medical Education?

This will be an issue for the relevant specialist college to decide.

Can I fail the re-entry program?

No, this is a voluntary support program and differs from college specific retraining programs that may require you to undertake some form of assessment. If you feel that additional training is required following the completion of refresher support, you should discuss this with your relevant specialist college.

I am an overseas trained doctor who is looking to return to work in the medical workforce. Am I eligible for this program?

The program is designed for any fully qualified practitioner who has achieved Fellowship with a recognised Australian specialist college or been recognised

as equivalent to an Australian trained specialist, or who holds a postgraduate qualification from a specialist medical college. If you meet one of these criterion you may be eligible for this program.

If not, as an overseas trained doctor, you may be eligible for another program under the enhanced Medicare package. Further information regarding overseas trained doctor initiatives may be obtained from the Strengthening Medicare Information Line on **1800 011 163**.

I own a private practice and am interested in hosting a specialist re-entry placement or providing mentoring. How can I get involved?

If you are interested in hosting a specialist re-entry placement or providing mentoring, we encourage you to either contact your specialist college or the Strengthening Medicare Information Line on **1800 011 163**.

Will my practice receive an incentive to provide a placement under this scheme?

Yes, up to \$10,000 is available apart from funds for mentoring for the provision of facilities for a specialist re-entrant under this program.

For more information contact your specialist college, or the Strengthening Medicare Information Line on 1800 011 163 or go to www.health.gov.au.