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Editorial

Welcoming paramedics into the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme

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Paramedics are an important and valuable part of the health system. On 1 December 2018, paramedics will join the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (National Scheme), along with more than 750,000 other registered health practitioners in Australia. The heart of this National Scheme is public safety, which is delivered through the application of national standards for each of the registered health professions.

Paramedicine has its origin from very humble beginnings in Australia, which can be traced back to the late 1890s. In those early days, communities believed in and invested in the establishment of ambulance services to meet their care and transport needs. Paramedicine has seen almost unprecedented change in the past two decades to where it is today. All through this journey to become Australia's fifteenth registered health profession, paramedics have had the patient at the centre of everything they do – showing compassion, understanding and empathy to the circumstances and needs of those to whom they provide care.

Paramedics are working in a wide range of roles and environments, using sophisticated treatments and technology to provide high quality care for their patients. We should also not forget those paramedics who work in non-clinical roles. Those who make a major contribution to the profession every day using their professional knowledge working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, policy and regulatory roles that impact on the safe, effective delivery of services in the profession.

In meeting with paramedics and people from all over Australia, I am often asked the question – why is it so important that the profession of paramedicine is regulated? My response is always – because of the work that we do in the profession. Paramedics at times are required to carry out complex clinical interventions in a diverse range of emergency care settings, often away from direct supervision. It is therefore essential that the person providing care as a paramedic, using a title that is well documented as being highly respected by the public, is appropriately skilled, trained and qualified. The community must have the confidence and be assured, that as a registered paramedic, that person meets national standards for practice in the profession. That's why we have regulation.

Under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (National Law) 'paramedic' will become a protected title. This means that only people who are registered with the Paramedicine Board of Australia will be able to lawfully call themselves a paramedic. To become registered, paramedics must demonstrate that they meet the five mandatory national registration standards set by the Board. The registration standards were developed following extensive consultation with the paramedicine profession and the public. They set the minimum requirements for competent and safe practise of paramedicine in Australia and along with title protection, are the way the National Scheme protects the public.

It is important that all eligible paramedics apply for registration before 1 December 2018, if they want to call themselves a paramedic in accordance with the requirements of the National Law. I therefore encourage those paramedics to start their online registration now to avoid any processing delays that might occur with the expected large volume of applications received by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

The future seems very bright for paramedics as registered health professionals. The paramedic profession has seen monumental change in practice over recent decades with a comprehensive set of skills and technologies to provide world class services to Australian communities. Paramedics will work closely with their health practitioner colleagues in evolving roles to meet the increasing demand for health services, seeking innovative and new pathways in providing quality healthcare.

1 December 2018 will be a milestone event in the paramedicine profession's history, as finally, after many years of debate, deliberation and the sustained efforts of so many, all eligible paramedics will be welcomed into the National Scheme and acknowledged, in their own right, as registered health professionals.

Stephen Gough
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