

Credentialing For Medical Practitioners

Introduction

The *Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Regulations* (the regulations) state directives and set penalties under the *Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Act*. This includes the setting and verification of credentials by the Chief Health Officer.

Medical practitioners

Other than in circumstances where a termination is necessary to preserve the life of the woman, a termination of pregnancy must be performed by a suitably qualified medical practitioner. If the medical practitioner is not registered to practice as an obstetrician or gynaecologist, they will need to undergo a credentialing process to be confirmed as having obtained qualifications in the provision of advice, performance of procedures and giving treatment in the area of fertility control before performing or directing the performance of any termination of pregnancy procedures in the Northern Territory.

The credentialing process

Credentialing means the process of verifying qualifications, training, experience, professional standing and other relevant professional attributes of a medical practitioner used for the purpose of forming a view about the competence, performance and professional suitability of the medical practitioner. The *2004 National Standard for Credentialing and Defining the Scope of Clinical Practice* is the standard to be applied for the setting of credentials.

Credentialing for a suitably qualified medical practitioner

The definition of 'suitably qualified medical practitioner' in the Act requires that the medical practitioner:

- (a) is an obstetrician or gynaecologist or
- (b) is credentialed in the provision of advice, performance of procedures and giving treatment in the area of fertility control

The Chief Health Officer has set the following credentials as being required for recognition as a 'suitably qualified medical practitioner'. A medical practitioner must be able to satisfy the Chief Health Officer (or a delegate of the Chief Health Officer) that they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- AHPRA registration as a specialist obstetrician or gynaecologist
- an award of the DRANZCOG Advanced qualification from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- AHPRA registration as a medical practitioner who is currently certified under the Therapeutic Goods Administration licensing conditions to prescribe MS-2Step
- AHPRA registration as a medical practitioner, who also has sufficient experience in the surgical performance of termination of pregnancy to be deemed, by an independent practising gynaecologist, as being competent to perform surgical termination procedures independently and safely

A registrar in obstetrics and gynaecology or general practice may act as a suitably qualified medical practitioner, if acting under the supervision of a suitably qualified medical practitioner. A registrar's ability to prescribe MS-2Step in such circumstances depends on his/her certification under the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) licensing conditions.

A suitably qualified medical practitioner's scope of practice depends on his/her credentials. A suitably qualified medical practitioner whose credentials are restricted to TGA prescriber certification only, cannot undertake surgical termination procedures. A suitably qualified medical practitioner whose

Credentials for medical practitioners

credentials are restricted to surgical procedures only, cannot undertake medical terminations of pregnancy.

Responsibility for verifying credentials

The Chief Health Officer is responsible for verifying the credentials of suitably qualified medical practitioners. Under the provisions of the *Public and Environmental Health Act*, the Chief Health Officer is able to delegate a function of the Chief Health Officer to specified person(s).

The Chief Health Officer has, by instrument, delegated the function of verifying the credentials of suitably qualified medical practitioners to the executive officer, senior clinician or manager of a number of Northern Territory based health practices or facilities providing termination of pregnancy services. The Chief Health Officer will also be able to perform this function for a sole practitioner or for a practitioner whose executive officer, senior clinician or manager does not wish to be a delegate for credentialing procedures.

Other practitioners, practices or facilities providing termination of pregnancy services may also seek a delegation of the Chief Health Officer to permit them to verify the credentials of medical practitioners who will be performing termination of pregnancy services.

A delegate of the Chief Health Officer must maintain appropriate records of the verification process, including copies of documents provided to the delegate by the medical practitioner in support of their request to be recognised as a suitably qualified medical practitioner, and confirmation (or otherwise) of the credentials of a suitably qualified medical practitioner set by the Chief Health Officer being met.

The Chief Health Officer has prepared a form for use by the delegates which meets the requirements for appropriate records of credentialing of a suitably qualified medical practitioner. The form is designed to assist with the process of credentialing and associated record keeping or review. You will not be required to use the form, but may find it a quick and simple means of ensuring the process is appropriately undertaken and ensuring a suitable record is available for the practice and for the medical practitioner if there is ever any question about the lawfulness of a termination performed.

The delegate (or the Chief Health Officer) is required to review the credentials of a suitably qualified medical practitioner at intervals of not more than 2 years. The medical practitioner must meet the minimum credentials at the time of review to maintain recognition as a suitably qualified medical practitioner.

The Chief Health Officer will also have the power to request access to records of a delegate to undertake a review of the verification of credentials of a medical practitioner to be recognised as a suitably qualified medical practitioner.

For enquires about the verifying credentials or seeking a delegation from the Chief Health Officer, contact the Women's Health Strategy Unit via: WomensHealth.DoH@nt.gov.au

Penalties

Medical practitioners must provide true and accurate information to the Chief Health Officer for their credentialing. Intentionally providing false or misleading credentialing information to the Chief Health Officer may result in a penalty.

A penalty will not apply under two circumstances:

1. the medical practitioner draws the misleading aspect to the attention of the Chief Health Officer when providing the credentialing document or
2. the medical practitioner provides the Chief Health Officer with the information necessary to remedy the misleading aspect of the document