



Education subcommittee

Postgraduate Medical Council of Victoria Inc.

## GUIDELINES TO ASSIST THE EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT OF INTERNS REQUIRING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

**Subject:** *Early identification and support of interns requiring performance improvement*

**Guideline Name:** *Guidelines to assist the early identification and support of interns requiring performance improvement.*

**Date Approved:** *October 2017*

### Background

In 2014, a national framework for intern training was developed by the Medical Board of Australia (MBA) in conjunction with the Australian Medical Council (AMC). The framework includes a national intern assessment form<sup>1</sup> with criteria to assist completion, and an Improving Performance Action Plan (IPAP)<sup>2</sup> for interns who require remediation or additional support. The IPAP is an aid for supervisors and interns to formulate and document the remediation process and should include the performance issues requiring remediation, the specific actions and deadlines jointly agreed with the intern, and provision for tracking progress.

Medical educators and junior doctors have provided the PMCV with insight into the IPAP process and highlighted barriers to IPAP effectiveness. Junior doctors have reported a negative perspective of IPAPs, specifically, that they create anxiety, stigma, and potentially have a negative impact on career progression. Supervisors and medical educators report that there is often a delay in recognising the under-performing intern and the initiation of an IPAP, coupled with uncertainty about how to achieve performance improvement.

These guidelines have been developed by the Postgraduate Medical Council of Victoria in consultation with Victorian medical educators, supervisors, and junior doctors. The guidelines aim to provide suggestions that will promote early recognition of the under-performing intern, and increase the effectiveness of the IPAP process.

Note: Both referenced documents use the term 'remediation' to describe the process of performance improvement, however to promote a positive perspective of the IPAP process and to address concerns about the perceived negative connotations of the term, this document will refer to the remediation process as 'performance improvement'.

### Responsibilities of Health Services

- Orientation programs should provide interns with comprehensive information about supervision and the assessment process, including the IPAP process and purpose. The aim is to 'normalise' assessment and the IPAP process so that it is viewed as an opportunity for improvement rather than a punitive measure;

- Health services should ensure that supervisors of interns, and interns, receive appropriate education about the assessment and IPAP processes, and the resources available to support performance improvement;
- It is advised that health services develop a strategy to assist supervisors to make an evaluation of an intern's performance early in the rotation (week 2-3 of a 10 week rotation);
- A team approach to assessment and performance improvement is recommended; ideally the team would be well-known to the intern and include the consultant/head of unit, registrar/s, Director of Clinical Training (DCT), Supervisor of Intern Training (SIT), and the Medical Education Officer (MEO);
- When complex performance improvement issues are identified, other relevant personnel should be co-opted to the team to establish a review group. This group should be chaired by an experienced clinician with expertise in educating and training interns;
- Health services are encouraged to develop a protocol to 'feed forward' information related to IPAPs that are incomplete at the time an intern commences a new rotation. There should be clear guidelines as to the intern's role in this transfer of information and how, and with whom, the information is shared. The progress of ongoing IPAPs will ideally be managed and monitored by the DCT or SIT;
- Health services should offer support to interns involved in the IPAP process;
- Health services should have a process of appeal available to the intern, where the intern does not feel the assessment / IPAP / performance improvement measures are fair and reasonable;
- It is incumbent on the health service to ensure that confidentiality is maintained with regard to IPAP arrangements and that there are clear guidelines about how and with whom information can be shared.

#### **Responsibilities of Supervisors / Educators**

- Supervisors are encouraged to assist interns to set learning objectives for each term and to identify areas for development as part of their assessment;
- Early recognition of the under-performing intern necessitates early evaluation of an intern's performance, ideally in the second or third week of a 10 week rotation. This aims to maximize the opportunity to implement performance improvement strategies. MEOs are well-placed to coordinate the performance review process early in each rotation;
- Supervisors (and others involved in the IPAP process) are required to have a thorough understanding of the assessment and IPAP processes and effective strategies to support performance improvement;
- The role of the MEO is primarily to support the intern through the IPAP process and to assist supervisors and others involved in the IPAP process to follow through with the negotiated action plan;

- Supervisors should prioritise performance review processes and, in conjunction with the MEO, ensure that time is allocated to achieve this outcome;
- Supervisors, in consultation with the intern and DCT or SIT, should follow the relevant health service protocol regarding transfer of information (feeding forward) when an IPAP is incomplete and the intern is commencing a new rotation. This aims to ensure that ongoing support is provided to the intern and that the progress of an ongoing IPAP will be managed and monitored;
- All decisions regarding additional performance improvement or non-completion of a term must be clearly documented and communicated to the Director of Medical Services (or other as appropriate);
- Supervisors and educators should be informed and clear about the process of appeal within their organisation. They should have information available to provide to the intern about their right to appeal processes / decisions around performance assessments. Processes should include support process for the junior doctor in event of grievance/appeal;
- Supervisors and all others involved in the assessment and IPAP processes are required to maintain confidentiality about IPAP arrangements and understand the constraints regarding how and with whom information is shared.

#### **Responsibilities of Interns**

- Interns are encouraged to set their learning objectives for each term and to review these with their supervisor early in each rotation;
- Interns are encouraged to self-reflect and self-evaluate their performance to identify their own performance improvement needs;
- Interns are encouraged to proactively seek early evaluation of their performance (week 2-3 of the rotation). 'No news is good news' is not an appropriate assumption of adequate performance;
- Interns can initiate the IPAP process if they identify areas of their performance that require improvement;
- Interns should work with their supervisor (and others involved in the IPAP process) to develop a negotiated plan for performance improvement and have a clear understanding of the agreed steps and actions;
- Interns are encouraged to support the transfer of information about an ongoing IPAP to the supervisor, DCT / SIT, and relevant others when commencing a new rotation, to ensure that ongoing support is provided;
- Interns should understand the process of appeal and gain knowledge regarding appropriate actions available to them within the appeals process;
- Interns should have the option to seek support during the IPAP process, which is independent of the assessment/IPAP processes.



**For further guidance:**

AMC Intern training – National standards for programs 5.2.1–5.2.6 address feedback and performance review.  
[http://www.amc.org.au/files/37fdb7b6fd3a1acdcc7800c23b42217737c2aa5\\_original.pdf](http://www.amc.org.au/files/37fdb7b6fd3a1acdcc7800c23b42217737c2aa5_original.pdf)

AMC Guide to intern training in Australia  
[http://www.amc.org.au/files/1490de5ab947ce44ae7c62f78660a089cabe92c8\\_original.pdf](http://www.amc.org.au/files/1490de5ab947ce44ae7c62f78660a089cabe92c8_original.pdf)

AMC Intern Training - Guidelines for Terms  
[http://www.amc.org.au/joomla-files/images/Accreditation/Intern\\_training-Guidelines\\_for\\_terms\\_2013\\_12\\_18.pdf](http://www.amc.org.au/joomla-files/images/Accreditation/Intern_training-Guidelines_for_terms_2013_12_18.pdf)

AMC Intern training – Assessing and certifying completion  
<http://www.amc.org.au/joomla-files/images/intern-training/intern-training-assessing-and-certifying-2014-09-24.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> AMC Intern training – term assessment form <http://www.amc.org.au/joomla-files/images/intern-training/intern-training-term-assessment-form-2014-09-24-colour.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> AMC Improving Performance Action Plan (IPAP) <http://www.amc.org.au/joomla-files/images/intern-training/intern-training-ipap-template-2014-09-24.pdf>