

Brief Overview/Update Queensland Anaesthetic Technician Review.

The review into the role and scope of practice of Anaesthetic Technicians working with-in Queensland Health facilities was originally floated in 2002-03 with the intention of including the project in the Enterprise Bargaining 5 process.

Because of lack of communication at some level this did not occur until the EB6 agreement was in place, at which time Queensland Health (QH) in consultation with the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and other key stake holders, appointed a project officer to conduct the review.

The final report with recommendations was handed to Queensland Health in August 2008.

The Queensland Nurses Union (QNU) as a key stakeholder responded to the recommendations in a document addressed to the QH Director General (DG) in December 2008. A subsequent meeting with QH, the AWU and the QNU apparently failed to resolve the QNUs concerns and they again presented a document to the DG voicing the unions concerns. It might be interesting to note that the QNU was apparently the only key stakeholder to lodge negative concerns to the review and the recommendations.

Lack of progression of the review recommendations resulted in the AWU lodging a Notice of Industrial Dispute with the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. The hearing was held at the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission on Wednesday 1st July 2009.

At the resultant meeting the Commissioner directed QH to negotiate with the AWU to agree on recommendations mentioned in the report that could be progressed.

At a meeting with QH on 9th September, the consensus emerged that the recommendation that held greatest interest for Anaesthetic Technicians was the progression to the Health Practitioners (HP) Stream. The rationale behind the consensus was HP allows significant advantages for progression/advancement professionally with subsequent appropriate remuneration and professional recognition and providing opportunities to develop comprehensive career structures for Anaesthetic Technicians.

On Thursday 8th October, our Industrial Advocate Peter Eldon informed us that the Australian Workers Union of Employees, Queensland Branch Executive passed the following:

“Executive authorise officers of the union to examine the possibility of Operational Stream occupations including Anaesthetic Technicians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Health Workers, Orthopaedic Technicians (Plaster Technicians) moving to the health professional Stream or any other alternatives that may be identified in order to improve their wages and conditions”.

While this may appear a seemingly innocuous statement, the enormity of this development and the impact it will have on the advancement of our “cause” cannot be underestimated.

Anaesthetic Technicians, Queensland Health and the AWU are scheduled to meet again on the 18th November when this commitment by the AWU will not doubt raise considerable interest and discussion.

It is important to keep in mind that while the review process is substantially a local Queensland issue, a positive end result could have a significant impact on the careers of all Anaesthetic Technicians employed in public hospitals throughout Australia. This is particularly relevant if the Federal Government assumes control of the state health systems as intimated by Mr. Kevin Rudd prior to the last federal election.

The flow on effect should also prove beneficial for Anaesthetic Technicians working within the various private health systems.

The continued progression towards compulsory national registration, currently facilitated by ASAPO, works well with the mandatory requirements for the proposed move to the HP Stream. I would encourage all Anaesthetic Technicians to take advantage of the opportunity for voluntary registration offered by ASAPO which will ultimately become the nationally recognised professional body for Anaesthetic Technicians.

We will endeavour to keep everyone updated with further developments as they emerge.