

AMA Corporate Medicine Publications

A number of publications dealing with corporate medical practice and contract issues are available from the AMA, including:

Corporatisation of Medical Practice – Decision Support Kit for Doctors

This kit contains information and advice for doctors who are considering or have joined a corporate medical practice. The Decision Support Kit is available to members of the AMA for no charge. Copies may be obtained from any AMA office.

The Corporate Medical Practice Newsletter

This newsletter reports on developments in the corporatisation of medical practice and is available to interested doctors for free via e-mail or facsimile. To subscribe contact the Federal AMA.

Medical Corporate Legislation

This paper is available from the Federal AMA and summarises recent changes to state and federal legislation enacted in response to the corporatisation of medical practice.

Guidelines on Service Contracts Between Doctors and Medical Practice Principals

This publication provides practical information for doctors who work in private practice on a sessional or contract basis or who run medical practices and employ or contract doctors to work for them. A copy can be obtained from the Remuneration and Conditions section on the Workplace page of the Federal AMA web site or by contacting the Federal AMA.

More Information

For confidential advice on the Code, individual contracts and other information (including an up-to-date list of signatories to the Code) contact:

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AMA

Corporate Code of Conduct



Information for Doctors

Corporate Medical Practice

The AMA recognises the diversity of medical practice models in Australia and that a growing number of doctors are considering or have decided to enter into contractual arrangements to provide medical services as independent practitioners within corporate medical practices. These developments have given rise to debate within the profession and the community over the implications for the practice of medicine in Australia.

Much of this debate has focussed on the importance of maintaining the absolute clinical independence of doctors in corporate medical practice and the potential impact of vertical integration on the cost and nature of medical service delivery. This debate has prompted Governments in a number of States to amend medical registration legislation aimed at addressing public and professional perceptions over the nature of corporate medical practice. The Federal Government has also been under considerable pressure by the opposition and its own Health Department to enact new laws to influence doctor behaviour, corporate practice locations and access to Medicare provider status.

In light of these developments the AMA's primary concern has been to represent and protect the interests of doctors in their decision making over engagements with corporate medical practices. The AMA has also sought to limit the pressure for new legislation directed at doctor behaviour by promoting self-regulation in this sector.

A priority has been to encourage the adoption of a Corporate Code of Conduct by the major GP Corporates to provide a transparent framework for corporate/doctor relationships. The result was the launch of a Corporate Code of Conduct in late 2001 with three initial signatories, Endeavour HealthCare, Mayne Health and the Gribbles Group. It is expected that in time other companies, both large and small, will become signatories.

Code of Conduct

The Code was designed to sit alongside existing State and Federal laws governing the practice of medicine and was not intended to duplicate these provisions. The Code does, however, contain additional provisions aimed at:

- Ensuring that corporates respect doctors' clinical independence and do not offer incentives intended to influence clinical decisions.
- Ensuring that all contractual arrangements entered into with medical practitioners are fair and reasonable and are not contrary to the principles set out in the Code.
- Ensuring that corporate ownership of and interests in companies to whom GPs refer their patients have to be disclosed.
- Protecting the privacy, confidentiality and security of patient information.
- Requiring signatories to submit to external compliance monitoring, a complaints resolution and investigation process and sanctions for failure to comply with the Code.

The Code will be administered by an industry Committee made up of corporate signatories and an independent Chair. In addition to maintaining a register of signatories and publicising the Code, the Committee will have the role of monitoring signatories' compliance with the Code rules.

The Code sets out a framework for dealing with alleged breaches, including the appointment by the Chair of an independent investigator to report on breach allegations. The Code Committee has the power to apply sanctions to signatories in breach of the Code, including expulsion, and must report on the operation of the Code, internal corporate complaints systems and alleged Code breaches, in its annual report.

Code Compliance and Self-Regulation

In giving in principle endorsement to the Code the AMA Federal Council resolved to continue a dialogue with medical corporations to refine and improve the Code's contents. Federal Council also resolved to encourage other medical corporations to become a signatory to the Code and to closely monitor signatory corporations' compliance with the Code rules.

Doctors are encouraged to become familiar with the Code, which may be downloaded from the "Workplace" pages of the AMA web site at www.ama.com.au/. A copy may also be obtained from the Workplace Policy Department of the AMA Federal Secretariat at the contact details overleaf.

The ultimate success of the Code in providing an effective self-regulatory framework for corporate medical practice will rest on the level of compliance with the Code rules. Doctors are encouraged to keep the AMA informed of developments in their corporate practices that impact on the Code. Information may be provided to the Federal AMA on a totally confidential basis and AMA Branches can also assist members on corporate contract issues.

The AMA will review its continued endorsement of the Code in the light of corporate compliance with it and the contents of the first annual report on the Code's operation, due 12 months after its implementation.

