



Secretary General's Report

The year started with a storm over the Government's proposed changes to Medicare billing, which had been announced late in 2014, and followed rapidly by the appointment of a new Minister, Sussan Ley, to calm the rising tide of anger among doctors and their patients. This set the theme for the year, with multiple reviews announced by the new Minister for Health but no overarching vision for health policy.

At the end of the year, the AMA was watching with caution the review into MBS services, the outcomes of the review of primary health care, the responses to the review of mental health, and the review of private health insurance. Underlying tensions remain within the health portfolio with the Government looking to modernise aspects of health policy, but also seeking to identify and deliver savings. These will play out as the nation heads toward the 2016 Federal Election.

Public health issues have continued to be of considerable interest to members during 2015, with members always willing to share their views with the AMA. During the year, member input was sought when the AMA reviewed its Position Statement on the impacts of climate change on human health. This was a good example where direct member consultation on a controversial but critical issue improved the final product.

In 2015, for the first time a National Conference was held without an AMA leadership election. The consensus of participants was that the absence of an election added to the collegiality of the event. The secretariat received many suggestions on approaches that might be taken to National Conference in the alternate, non-election year.

Federal Council has embraced the changed organisational structure with governance matters now managed by the Board, leaving Federal Council to focus on policy matters. The Chair of Federal Council, Dr Beverley Rowbotham, has encouraged broader contribution by members of Federal Council by including two policy-focused discussions at each meeting of the Council. These have ranged across the Federal Government's review agenda, the value of private health insurance, the challenges for the medical workforce, and more.

While the standing Councils and Committees of Federal Council continue to provide a solid foundation for the development of position statements for the AMA, more working groups have been used during the year to formulate rapid responses to current issues. These have included working groups to respond to the Federal Government's strategy on methamphetamines, the review of the climate change position statement, and formulation of policies on end of life care.

During the year, the Federal Council established a working group to review member representation on the Council and as delegates to National Conference. Federal Council accepted the recommendations of the working group, which were subsequently endorsed by the Board. The result is that Practice Groups replace Special Interest Groups, with two new groups added in 2015 – Rural Doctors and Private Specialist Practice. From 2017, the Practice Groups will nominate representatives to National Conference in addition to nominees of the State and Territory AMAs. Some minor amendments to the Constitution will be required at the 2016 Annual General Meeting.



A development in 2015 of considerable importance to the medical profession was the establishment of an AMA subsidiary, Doctors Health Services Pty Limited. With funding from the Medical Board of Australia and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, the company will coordinate the consistent delivery of health services to doctors and medical students across the country.

Another important development during 2015 was the formalisation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Medical Students' Association under which the AMA provides ongoing operational support, including appointment of an Executive Officer based within the AMA Secretariat. The medical students of today will be the AMA members of the future and the relationship supports early familiarity with the AMA.

At an operational level, 2015 has been a year of laying the foundations for future growth. A more efficient structure has been put in place for shared services functions within the AMA Group – shared information technology systems and staff, a shared finance team, and a Group human resources function. The restructure of the finance team has been supported by the transition to a new finance system, to be followed in 2016 with a new HR management system across the Group.

A high point in 2015 was the launch of the AMA's CPD tracker, which is freely available to members, and which supports reporting against the CPD requirements of every College. Online learning will be available through the doctorportal platform, with an emphasis on building learning content in 2016.

Following the re-launch of the AMA website in late 2014, several State AMAs now also have a home as subsidiary sites on the main site.

In 2016, there will be a major upgrade to the national member register. As the upgrade rolls out, the AMA will be refining the information it collects from members to support more streamlined member communications.

Staff changes during 2015 have introduced new skills and experience into the Secretariat, strengthening the AMA's capacity to undertake advocacy on behalf of members, and provide members with resources and information to support their practices.

I would like to thank the President and Vice President and the members of the Board and Federal Council, in particular the Chairs of each – Dr Elizabeth Feeney and Dr Beverley Rowbotham – for their commitment and support during 2015. I also thank the staff of the AMA Secretariat for their energy and passion for their work in supporting our members.

Anne Trimmer
Secretary General