



MEDIA RELEASE

FRIDAY, 6 MARCH 2009

NATIONAL REGULATION OFFERS BEST PROTECTION

Charges of sexual assault against an Occupational Therapist this week have highlighted the need for a national regulation scheme, the peak industry body governing Occupational Therapists has said.

The Council of Occupational Therapists Registration Boards (Australia and New Zealand) (COTRB) has been lobbying the Federal Government to include the profession in a national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals since last year.

Brisbane-based COTRB Chairman Jim Carmichael said it was vital that Occupational Therapists were subjected to the co-ordinated controls that regulate other health professions Australia-wide such as doctors, dentists, nurses, chiropractors and podiatrists.

Currently Occupational Therapists are regulated in half of the states and territories of Australia, but those in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and ACT do not have to be registered.

Mr Carmichael said Western Australia's registration system would ensure that if convicted, the 62-year-old man from the Perth suburb of Leeming who was charged this week would be subject to the industry regulations that operated in that state, including possible deregistration.

"But as it stands in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania or the ACT there is no way to ensure their therapist has the right credentials and is fit and proper to work in the profession, - and unscrupulous operators can simply move to another state where no regulations exist," Mr Carmichael said.

"National registration would offer that peace of mind and ensure unscrupulous operators were not able to simply move to practice in a state where no regulations existed."

"Such a scheme would provide for stringent channels for receiving and dealing with complaints."

Detectives from Perth's Child Abuse Squad charged a 62-year-old Leeming man with sex and indecent assault on Wednesday after searching his house.

Police said the charges related to incidents alleged to have occurred between 2004 and 2006 when a 20-year-old was a patient of the man at his West Leederville occupational therapy clinic.

Mr Carmichael said that without national regulation and registration, people with disabilities, developmental problems and mental illnesses remained at risk of assault, injury and death.

He said the current lack of accountability Australia-wide had contributed to tragedies such as the death of a woman with Down Syndrome in Tasmania after an Occupational Therapist did not properly attach bed rails and the death of a child in New South Wales when a postural harness was improperly fitted to a wheelchair.

In both cases, coroners found the unregistered therapists had contributed to the deaths.

“Occupational Therapists work in private practice and public settings with some of the most vulnerable members of our community, - people with disabilities, children and the elderly - trying to improve their quality of life,” Mr Carmichael said.

“It is imperative that we further protect these vulnerable people by ensuring strict standards are met in all facets of their care.

“Australia is one of the few countries in the world where no national regulation scheme exists – countries comparable to Australia such as the UK, Canada, New Zealand and the USA, recognise the value of regulating this profession and even places like Iran, Uganda and Thailand manage to have a national regulation system in place. It is beyond belief that Australia can’t get its act together and regulate Occupational Therapists.”

Mr Carmichael said that without national safeguards people who were unqualified and untrained practitioners could treat those with chronic illness and disabilities.

“National registration of Occupational Therapists will protect the public by ensuring therapy is delivered in a professional, ethical and competent way as well as enabling the public to have a clearer pathway for lodging complaints,” he said.

An Australian Health Ministers Conference (AHMC) met yesterday to discuss the national scheme, set to launch in July, 2010.

Ten professions, which are already registered in each state and territory, will be included in the scheme when it launches. Mr Carmichael said Occupational Therapists aimed to be included in the scheme in its next round, along with other health professions currently being prioritised by the AHMC.

“It is our understanding that Occupational Therapy is not among the prioritised professions for the next round and we want the AHMC to consider our therapists for national registrations as a matter of urgency,” Mr Carmichael said.

ENDS

Background

COTRB and OT Australia have lodged a submission with the Australian Workforce Principles Committee for inclusion in the national registration and accreditation scheme, due to be launched on 1 July, 2010.

Occupational therapy promotes health and wellbeing through occupation. It has an established body of teachable knowledge, standards of practice and defined functional competencies that equip practitioners to work collaboratively with people with a disability or impairment.

The profession’s primary goal is to enable people to participate in everyday life.

For further information, please contact:

Jodie Powell	Alyssa Green
Senior Consultant	Consultant
Three Plus	Three Plus
07 3503 5700	07 3503 5700
0409 946 796	0415 321 349