

June 6, 2017

NZRGPN submission on regulating the paramedic workforce under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003

The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network (The Network) agrees that the paramedic workforce provides a health service to vulnerable people in sometimes extreme and life threatening situations, which is often provided under the minimum of supervision, therefore carrying a potential risk of harm to the public.

The consultation document provides a comprehensive overview of the potential risk of harm that paramedics may pose.

We believe there is little evidence, either through the HDC system, or in the media that paramedics have caused undue harm in a widespread or systemic manner.

We are well aware of an incident of harm by an ambulance officer who used sedating medication on patients and performed sexual acts on them while in a single crew situation. This case went to court and was dealt with. Otherwise we are not aware of any other incidents of harm caused by an ambulance officer or paramedic.

The Network agrees that it is in the best interest of the public to have the transparency and safety, and for paramedics to have the credibility and a creditable standards that are offered under the HPCA act 2003

The Network believes that existing mechanisms of regulation are too dependent on the employer, and while the two main current employers - St John and Wellington Free Ambulance services - offer a high degree of training and set high standards, there is no national mechanism which sets standards in a compulsory manner. There is considerable risk for consumers in a self-regulatory environment.

We do not believe that the existing mechanisms regulating the paramedic workforce can be strengthened with regulation under the HPCA Act. The mechanism for strengthening regulations and codes of conduct belongs alongside that of other comparable workforces, who provide healthcare in a similar environment, with a similar training pathway. If you want to stand tall, and walk beside other health care providers, then you must provide evidence to the public, in a nationally consistent environment and independent to your employer, of your regulations and codes of conduct. It shows that your sector is mature and able to hold up to the scrutiny of the public in a transparent manner.

Self-regulation is too open to manipulation within the sector. However, the fact that it hasn't happened doesn't mean it won't happen.

The HPCA Act 2003 was created with the intention of providing safety for a vulnerable public, it is well-established and familiar in the health care arena, it is dependable. The Network believes it is in the best interests of the paramedic workforce to utilise the HPCA Act 2003, for their regulations.

The Network believes that the paramedic workforce fulfils the criteria to regulate under the HPCA act 2003 as laid out in the consultation document.

Table 11 lays out a comprehensive and compelling list of benefits to the paramedic workforce and to the health sector and public. Any disadvantage in costs and set-up arrangements are mitigated by these benefits, especially in view of the support that they are likely to receive by the nursing council which currently successfully regulates the largest registered health sector workforce.

The Network believes that registration under the HPCA Act 2003 enables a greater degree of professionalism and consistency with codes of conduct and aligns with other registered workforce. There is no doubt that the benefits to the sector as a whole including consumers outweighs disadvantage.

- The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network is a membership and support organisation for rural health professionals. As part of our business operation we are contracted by the New Zealand government to provide a rural locum support and recruitment service which we do under the "NZLocums" brand, recruiting health professionals nationally and internationally.

Sharon Hansen



Chairperson, New Zealand Rural General Practice Network

This submission is based on views of the NZRGPN Executive Board but may not reflect the full or particular views of all of its members.