



27 July 2010

W15
JM;rp

Mr Jeff Matthews
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
WorkCover
DX 660
ADELAIDE 5001

Dear Jeff,

Peer Review of Medical Reports

Thank you for your letter of 15 June 2010 regarding changes to Permanent Impairment Peer Review process.

Your letter was referred to the Accident Compensation Committee and was considered at its meeting on 6 July 2010.

The Accident Compensation Committee maintain their previous submissions that it is inappropriate to dispense with the previously used permanent impairment Peer Review process established by WorkCover. Your letter acknowledged that that process:

“was very successful, as it enabled stakeholders time to become familiar with and apply the new methodology. In particular it has improved the level of assessment skills of the accredited assessors and the knowledge of legal practitioners as the application of the Guidelines in the American Medical Association’s Guides”.

It is understood that as recently as May 2010 further education was provided for Permanent Impairment Assessors and the Society supports the continuing accreditation of additional Permanent Impairment Assessors. There are significant delays in obtaining permanent impairment assessments in respect to certain specialties and limited numbers of Accredited Assessors.

The methodology of assessment of permanent impairment is by no means an easy process. As the preface to AMA 5 reads, the guides apply updated scientific criteria being a blend of evidence based medicine and specialty society consensus recommendations. Permanent Impairment Assessors not only have the benefit of a 7 year university qualification but also their specialty training. Medical reports contain detailed medical terminology and medical descriptions. The exercise of clinical judgement by medical practitioners is gained by training and experience.

The Accident Compensation Committee does not believe that the long term strategy proposed for the review of permanent impairment reports is an appropriate strategy.

The Committee believes that it is only appropriate that report reviewers must have the necessary medical training and qualifications to understand medical terminology and medical descriptions in order to be able to liaise effectively and perform the function required of Peer Review or review.

The role of Peer Review is also seen as an important education tool for medical practitioners and members of the legal profession. The Accident Compensation Committee believes that there was good feedback between the previous Peer Review assessors and the medical profession who provided PIA reports and is concerned that that good rapport may not continue if the level of qualification held by "Impairment Officers" does not include a medical qualification and significant practical and clinical experience of medical terminology and medical descriptions and knowledge and evidence of the methodologies of assessment.

Assessments of impairment under Section 43 are intended to be remedial and the complexities of AMA 5 and the Guidelines do in some instances enable different methodologies of impairment assessment. For example a patient may have a restriction in joint movement which may be caused by a bone injury but also, may be caused by a peripheral nerve injury. The assessment of that impairment requires the Assessor (and any peer reviewer ("Impairment Officers")) to have a sound knowledge of anatomy and hence an extensive medical background. Another example is that the methodology of impairment of lower limb impairments have 13 different methods of assessment and a worker is entitled to the most specific and most appropriate and benevolent methodology of assessment.

Accordingly the Accident Compensation Committee does not support the current arrangement of the appointment of the impairment officers accommodated at EML as those impairment officers do not have the same level of training as medical practitioners and are not specialist medical practitioners. Further, although WorkCover announced that the Peer Review process would be concluded after 12 months, the fact is that the process of Peer Review was acknowledged by the initial appointment of two experienced medical practitioners each of whom provide valuable and continuing feedback to members of the medical profession who provided reports.

We ask that these matters be further considered by the WorkCover Corporation.

Yours sincerely



Jan Martin
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR