

Manitoba Pursues Paramedic Self-Regulation

Self-regulation has been a topic of discussion among paramedics in Manitoba since 1983, first as members of the Manitoba Pre-hospital Care Personnel Association and then under the leadership of the Manitoba Prehospital Professions Association. In early 2001 the Paramedic Association of Manitoba (PAM) was formed with the vision to pursue paramedic self-regulation.

The regulation of health care professions in Manitoba is governed by *The Regulated Health Professions Act* (RHPA). This legislation introduced a formal application process to be followed by health care providers seeking designation as a “profession” and requesting the establishment of a self-regulating “College”. On February 17, 2012, after years of discussion and more than 8 months of preparatory work, the Paramedic Association of Manitoba became the first applicant to apply for self-regulation under this new legislation.

Health professions are regulated to ensure the public is protected when they seek or receive health care. Self-regulation is premised by the concept that members of a profession, based on their knowledge, skills and judgment, are best suited to govern their profession in the public interest. It is on this basis that our application was prepared.

With the advent of the National Occupational Competency Profiles (NOCP), a defined and very specialized body of education and competence requirements was accepted for entry into the practice of paramedicine. Many of the procedures conducted by paramedics are considered to be “reserved acts” (medical acts) as defined in the new *Regulated Health Professions Act*. Whether considering enhanced education and entry to practice standards, mandating improved continuing competency requirements, or investigating a practice complaint, self-regulation allows much needed flexibility for the profession to adopt evidence based best practice and policy, and ensure appropriate accountability, transparency and public protection.

Included within the application were numerous documents of support, including letters from paramedics, the Paramedic Association of Canada, the EMS Chiefs of Canada (now Paramedic Chiefs of Canada), the Manitoba College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Manitoba College of Registered Nurses, and unions representing nearly 80% of practicing paramedics in this province.

On receipt of our application, the Minister of Health tasked the provincial Health Professions Advisory Council (HPAC) to “investigate and advise whether paramedics in Manitoba should be regulated under the RHPA, and if so, what would be the appropriate college, scope of practice, reserved acts, and titles” to consider. As a result, HPAC launched a public review of the PAM application, inviting interested parties to make written submissions by June 20, 2012 in response to the document.

Following public notification and receipt of several formal written submissions, HPAC contacted PAM and asked for additional information based on their review to that point. Early this year, our Association provided HPAC with the requested supplementary submission. Then on May 23, 2013, a public meeting was held to give PAM and participants in the review process an opportunity to respond to any issues raised in submissions to that point. We were extremely pleased that PAC, the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada and the Paramedic Association of New Brunswick all had representatives travel to Winnipeg and lend further support our application for self-regulation!

The public meeting and a further two week window for additional follow-up to the oral presentations concluded HPAC's information gathering process. They will now make confidential, non-binding recommendations to Government with respect to our application and whether or not paramedics should be regulated under the RHPA. Unlike the Ontario process, there are no published timelines to govern Manitoba's review process, so it's unclear at this time when we might expect that report to be delivered to the Minister of Health.

Our current regulatory model, whereby physicians assume responsibility for paramedic practice at arm's-length under their medical licenses, is unreasonable and quite frankly unmanageable. Paramedics should be expected to take responsibility for their own decisions and actions, and as such should be subject to the same regulatory responsibilities as other health professionals under the RHPA. We are hopeful that paramedics in Manitoba will soon be regulated by a College of Paramedics under the framework of that legislation.