6 June 2014

To the Honourable Peter Dutton
Federal Minister for Health and Minister for Sport
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Position Statement from the Australian Society for Simulation in Healthcare (ASSH) and Simulation Australia regarding the abolition of Health Workforce Australia

Minister Dutton,

The Australian Simulation in Healthcare community is concerned to read of the abolition of Health Workforce Australia (HWA) in the recent Federal Budget (May 2014). ASSH would like to acknowledge the funding to projects and programs which have enabled many Simulation Australia / ASSH members to undertake critical work in healthcare simulation and provide a high level of impact on clinical training.

This work has the objective of improving the efficiency of training and education in healthcare, increasing the number of qualified people and meeting the growing demand for healthcare professionals. The programs initiated by HWA are also targeted at achieving better outcomes for patients, in turn increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the healthcare system as a whole.

Through the 44 funded capacity building projects, overseen by HWA, significant advancements have been made in simulation practices across 22 (eligible) health professions. Access to facilities and training has greatly improved for healthcare practitioners particularly in rural and remote areas. Over 910,000 hours of simulation training has been delivered across Australian States and Territories with a growth in clinical training hours of 118% from 2011. These programs not only provide clinical training opportunities but also underpin the future simulation capacity development vital to meet Australia’s healthcare training requirements. Without ongoing support of the programs the government is unlikely to see the best return on investment of the existing programs. Ongoing support of the initial HWA capital and program investment will increase simulation training opportunities which will alleviate pressure on clinical placements.

The key benefits that simulation provides are:

- rehearsal of the spectrum of clinical skills and patient care practices prior to student placements
- continuing professional development opportunities (including communication and team behaviours)
- guaranteed exposure to patient scenarios that require timely recognition, escalation and responses
- awareness of issues regarding patient safety and insights into improved, safe, clinical practices
- testing of teams and systems for improved efficiencies
- improved overall preparation of entry level healthcare practitioners to the workforce (achieving efficiencies in transitioning to practice)

There is strong evidence that simulation in healthcare curricula and continuing education improves clinicians’ learning outcomes (1, 2), clinical practice (3, 4), and enables local transformation (5) that improves access to care. Strong evidence about the benefits of simulation for improving patient outcomes and reducing the educational burden on clinical delivery are emerging from current research.
The funding of healthcare simulation in Australia has attracted intense interest from the global healthcare simulation community (6) and international simulation developers. The weight of the work undertaken to date is so important and has already had significant impact on the health workforce that ASSH believes this needs to continue to ensure the current and future workforce are adequately prepared. To ensure sustainability and a good return on investment of existing programs, funding is required for the simulation community to provide oversight. ASSH, as part of Australia’s peak body in simulation, has the potential to fulfill this role and help the government level the initial HWA investment.

Notable HWA funded projects with national and international impact include:

- The SimNET website (see www.simnet.net.au) for the maintenance and enhancement of the Simulation Health Directory; and for the Directory of Simulation Education Resources within this website. The latter project is urgently required to provide quality resources for simulation providers across Australia to accelerate deployment of training.

- A national program for simulation educators (NHET-Sim) was developed in response to earlier work commissioned by HWA with respect to current and potential use of simulation in all entry level health professions. The dominant need was investment in people – in simulation educators who will enable critical health workforce training needs to be met through simulation (e.g. clinical placements), as in other high reliability industries. The success of this national program, developed and delivered by Australian simulation experts, requires funding beyond December 2014. NHET-Sim will have delivered training to 4,595 clinical educators across all professions by December end. The body of work and developed resources embedded within this program confers substantial benefit to those working in healthcare simulation within AND beyond Australia. NHET-Sim could also be extended to provide continuing professional development (CPD) points required for annual registration across health professions.

- Simulation Accreditation and Certification framework to ensure healthcare simulations is delivering effective and efficient clinical education. This follows on from the HWA scoping program.

Some projects have not yet reached maturity such as: Quality Frameworks for simulation programs and educators; and we are now at a critical juncture for embedding simulation into accredited health professions curricula. It is vital that this work continues and ASSH look forward to working collaboratively with the nominated body within the Department of Health who would be responsible for the ongoing administration of these projects.

Australia is now in an internationally leading position of providing simulation related expertise and consulting to countries in the early stages of this transformation in healthcare practice and education. Continued Government support would expand the possibilities for medical education ‘tourism’ and international partnerships particularly with our Asian neighbours. Forays into these geographical areas have already been achieved through the activities of a number of the ASSH executive committee who are internationally recognised for their work, research and publication in healthcare simulation.

There is much more that can be achieved within the simulation in healthcare community, in delivery and evaluation of effectiveness. Simulation Australia and ASSH have developed 3-year Roadmaps (enclosed) to unite, grow, and create opportunities. ASSH has led the development of a national agenda for research in healthcare simulation. This agenda provides direction for the contribution that simulation can offer for developing the health workforce and safe clinical practice. We look forward to discussing such matters with you and your advisors in person.

Regards,

Michelle Kelly
Chair ASSH
On behalf of the Simulation Australia / ASSH membership
References


