

Health Insights

Ask for help, and ask early – advice for surviving an AHPRA notification

Meridian Lawyers regularly assists health practitioners who have been the subject of notification to statutory health authorities such as AHPRA, HCCC and the OHO. Our role is to help these practitioners understand, respond to and navigate the complaints process. Unfortunately, we regularly hear clients express distress that they are the subject of complaint. Many suffer high levels of stress and feel as though their competency has been impugned. Some even fear that they may lose their livelihood or face suspension of their registration.

These experiences are not unusual, and are concerning given the number of notifications made against health practitioners each year. In 2017/2018 alone, AHPRA received 3,749 notifications about doctors, more than 80% of which resulted in no further action¹.

In an effort to help practitioners better understand the notifications process, decrease unnecessary stress and provide realistic expectations about the likely outcome, AHPRA has released its second video in a year documenting the experience of a doctor who has been the subject of a complaint. You can watch the video on AHPRA's webpage via [this link](#).

In the video, 'Phil' (a surgeon), describes his feelings of anxiety which arose during the process. He recalls feeling guilty about the clinical outcome for the patient concerned, and questioned his own adequacy as a doctor. Phil recounts how he became an increasingly defensive, cautious clinician, and that his anxiety about the notification affected his ability to lead and partake in wider professional affairs.

Phil's main message is to seek help, and to do so early. He encourages practitioners to contact their GP, family, friends and peers, but also their professional indemnity insurer/medical defence organisations and lawyers. The support provided by these people and organisations helped him to gain perspective on the likely outcome

¹ https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Notifications/A-notification-has-been-made/Understanding-your-experience.aspx?utm_source=social&utm_medium=release&utm_campaign=notification

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of his case. He says “sharing both the facts and the feelings with others has been one of the most helpful things getting through this process”.

Meridian Lawyers can provide support to health practitioners who have been the subject of complaint to statutory health authorities by assisting with their response.

This article was written by Principal Scott Ames and Associate Anna Martin. Please contact Scott if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance to you.



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