

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

**ABN 37 008 426 793**

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**Transcript:**

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, with Red Symons, 'Breakfast', ABC Radio Melbourne, 29 November 2017

**Subject:**

Revalidation – New Health Checks for Doctors over the age of 70

**RED SYMONS:** Now, I had a curious thing happen recently - 14 minutes past seven - I had an appointment that had been set up for some time with the doctor and I went at the appointed hour to have the meeting with the doctor and he had a sickie.

Yeah. And I did point out to the receptionist that if he's really got a sickie he should have some other doctor sign the certificate, not actually give himself a sickie - I don't think you can do that. But, I mean, really good doctors are often really quite old, and what is the thought around the notion of health checks for older doctors?

Dr Michael Gannon is the Federal President of the AMA. Good morning, Doctor.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Good morning, Red.

**RED SYMONS:** So, I reckon doctors are in a good position. I was recently asked to give commentary on something on the television and the caption was former rock star; you never get to be a former doctor, do you?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, the right to practise medicine well into advanced age is something that's very important to doctors. You get very used to the title, you get very used to the respect that other members of the community afford you and, in many cases, you can appropriately practise medicine well into your advanced years.

The Medical Board of Australia has announced some new changes yesterday which demand health checks for doctors over 70. Overall, we support those changes.

**RED SYMONS:** Well, I would have thought as a matter of course for a doctor - who'd be getting mate's rates for a start - you would, I bet you, you had all these tests yourself every year.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Look, not necessarily. I think that - not to stretch the conversation too far - doctors would like patients to have a better literacy about the limitations of tests. So you can't just have a shotgun approach to various investigations; you'll often turn out something else. A common diagnosis in medicine is an incidentaloma ...

[Laughter]

**MICHAEL GANNON:** ... you find a lump on a form of imaging, which leads to more imaging and, in good faith, you're required to then investigate that. So, no, I don't have these tests every year. But of course, as I head into my 60s and 70s, I would have an expectation that I would be having tests of one form or another. I certainly ...

**RED SYMONS:** Right. You're under 60, are you?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** I'm under 50, Red. So, yeah, I'm in fighting good fitness in early middle age.

**RED SYMONS:** Well, what happened to the last Federal President of the AMA? Had to retire because he was sick.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** I don't know which one that was. But, no, but certainly I hope to continue to give this job the vigour it deserves. But in terms of doctors practising over the age of 70, so many of them are still well and truly capable.

So many of them might have reduced their scope of practice, reduced their hours; but they've got so much wisdom, so much experience, and their ability to continue to teach, not just medical students and junior doctors, but their more junior consultant colleagues.

And, of course, doctors spend a lot of time teaching nurses and physiotherapists and midwives anyway; that's really important that they continue to do that, provided they are healthy and well enough.

**RED SYMONS:** It's not uncommon for a doctor to be working at 70 or 80 or - I'm guessing - even 90, but probably not five days a week?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, that's right. And what we said to the Medical Board of Australia when they were looking at various proposals of revalidation - a term used in the UK, and a model we were very keen to avoid - was that we acknowledge that in many other industries, and certainly many other industries involving professionals, that there is mandatory retirement in the late 60s or at age 70.

We didn't think that was a good idea. But with appropriate safeguards for the public, we think it's entirely appropriate that a significant proportion of doctors might work well through their 70s, through their 80s, yeah, and perhaps even into their 90s.

**RED SYMONS:** Yeah, yeah. What sort of health checks have been - well, firstly, there's the business of doing exams. Doctors in the UK - is it - that they actually have to sit their exam again at the age of 75. [Laughs].

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well that was re-introduced in the United Kingdom and, of course, re-introduced without a scrap of evidence that it actually protected patients.

So, one of the things we're very happy to support in the Medical Board's proposals is that there needs to be ramped up continuing medical education. I mean, there was a situation where if you weren't keeping up with your CPD - your continuing professional development - your College couldn't tell the Board. Now, that's not appropriate.

So we support the minimalist model that the Board's come up with, including the health checks for people as they get older.

It's entirely appropriate that if you're seeing a doctor - at any age - you're entitled to think that they're healthy, their cognitive abilities are maintained, and also you're entitled to think that they are keeping pace with the rapid changes in technology and scientific knowledge true of most medical specialities.

**RED SYMONS:** Is there a requirement for the doctor you go to get a health check from ... to be at arm's length from you?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** We need to look at that detail, but the truth is that doctors maintain professionalism when they are dealing with patients. So many of us are only one degree or two degrees separated from our patients.

Now, if you're talking about smaller regional towns, everyone knows everyone. But even in our larger cities most of us aren't too far separated. I would expect doctors to show the appropriate level of professionalism and, equally, the public's confidence in the regulations around registration are important.

So, if the rules mandated that it wasn't someone who was well known to you, we would have to look at that. Of course, it's so important that doctors, just like every other member of society do, place their trust and have their own GP. In many circumstances, they might know that GP socially or professionally.

**RED SYMONS:** Or they could be a partner in the same business for all we know. [Laughs].

Yes. No, I think that it's good that you are cognisant of the need to consider your own health. I'm sure you do on a regular basis.

Thank you Doctor.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Alright. A pleasure, Red.

**RED SYMONS:** Dr Michael Gannon, Federal President of the AMA.

Australian doctors aged 70 plus are being encouraged to have regular health checks in a move by the Medical Board of Australia.

---

29 November 2017

CONTACT:     John Flannery                   02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761  
                  Maria Hawthorne               02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/ama\\_media](http://twitter.com/ama_media)

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Follow *Australian Medicine* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaausmed>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>