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Clare Haughey MSP
Convener
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
Scottish Parliament

Via email: hscs.committee@parliament.scot

15 May 2025

Dear Clare,

ANAESTHESIA ASSOCIATES AND PHYSICIAN ASSOCIATES

Thank you for your letter of 29 April requesting an update on the regulation of anaesthesia associates (AAs) and physician associates (PAs).

As my predecessor set out in his appearance before the Committee, the Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates Order (AAPAO) was the first stage of the much delayed UK-wide regulatory reform programme that will modernise the legislative frameworks of each of the UK professional healthcare regulators. The AAPAO came into effect on 13 December 2024 and allows a two year transition period before it will become an offence to practise as an AA or PA in the UK without obtaining registration with the General Medical Council (GMC).

Upon conclusion of the AAPAO's parliamentary passage, the Scottish Government established the Medical Associate Professionals (MAPs) Programme Board (MPB) in April 2024 to develop consistent clinical governance arrangements supported by appropriate guidance to ensure that across NHS Scotland the roles can be safely and effectively utilised. It is comprised of key stakeholders from the AA, PA and medical professions; NHS Education for Scotland (NES); Chief Officers including the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer; the GMC; professional membership bodies; employers; and staff side organisations.

The MPB's workplan covers a range of workforce aspects relating to the roles, including those rightfully raised by the Committee, and has already considered issues relating to scope of practice and supervision (albeit on a provisional basis). It has overseen the development and implementation of workforce coding to improve the data capture for each of the MAP roles. Health Boards have since been working to adopt the new codes which will ultimately provide a better understanding of the roles across NHS Scotland. NES is also

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currently in the process of standardising educational support for MAP learners and establishing systems to support their supervision and assessment.

The MPB is supported by a stakeholder group which is co-chaired by a representative from the medical and PA professions and seeks to ensure that the full spectrum of stakeholder views are represented in decision-making. Members of both groups, and indeed wider stakeholders, have indicated that they are supportive of the approach taken in Scotland.

Additionally, the Scottish Association of Medical Directors (SAMD) has commissioned work to develop a PA Professional Assurance Framework for use in all Health Boards to support Medical Directors in meeting their obligations. The scope of this framework covers the knowledge, policies, roles and systems that underpin professional regulation at Board level.

The Committee may already be aware of the UK Government's independent review into the safety and effectiveness of the roles undertaken by Professor Gillian Leng. While it territorially applies to NHS England, its remit includes issues previously considered, or intended to be considered, by the MPB, therefore demonstrating that these are not unique to the roles in England.

It is my view – and that of key stakeholders – that consensus is required for the benefit of patients, professionals and employers alike. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care last year to set out the position in Scotland while making clear the benefits of a four nations approach, where appropriate, to its recommendations. Professor Leng also attended the recent MPB meeting on 6 May to hear firsthand the discussions taking place in Scotland and indicated a willingness to continue engaging with the devolved governments over the coming weeks.

Ultimately, though, it will be for the MPB to make recommendations on how the roles can be safely utilised within NHS Scotland and I have been clear that these must be underpinned by robust evidence.

I hope that the Committee is reassured by the approach that we are taking in Scotland and I am happy to provide a further update upon conclusion of the MPB's work.

Yours sincerely,



NEIL GRAY MSP

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