

DEFENCE FORCE REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL

DENTAL OFFICERS SPECIALIST CAREER AND SALARY STRUCTURE

REASONS FOR DECISION

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has sought the introduction of a specialist career and salary structure for ADF Dentists. This is the third new specialist officer structure that the ADF has asked the Tribunal to approve, the first being the Legal Officers structure introduced in February 2000 and the second being the Chaplains Specialist structure approved in February 2003.

At the conclusion of the hearing into the Dental Officer Specialist matter on 14 May 2003 the Tribunal approved the new career structure and salary rates as sought by the ADF and supported by the parties.

We now publish our Reasons for Decision.

BACKGROUND

The salaries for Dental Officers have been aligned with those of Medical Officers since 1948. A number of reviews since then have maintained that alignment.

The first time the Tribunal considered a detailed submission on Medical and Dental Officers was in 1990 (Matter 6 of 1990) when the Tribunal approved a new salary scale for these officers in the context of the second structural efficiency adjustment. The medical/dental nexus was retained by agreement between the Commonwealth and the ADF in this matter. This was based on the view that despite some differences in rates in the public sector (with medical officers at a lower rate on commencement), broad parity was achieved at the middle levels. The ADF further submitted that maintenance of the nexus was essential to the proper management of health services, and that in the absence of any compelling factors to the contrary, there was no basis for breaking the parity.

The 1990 structure was rank based and did not take account of value for the work actually performed or levels of skill and competencies attained. The structure was as follows:

- undergraduates were appointed as Lieutenants (or equivalent);
- After graduation and registration Dental Officers were promoted to Captain, and then underwent Service specific officer induction training and a short course in Basic Forensics and Relative Analgesia; and
- Service specific training and promotion continued through to the rank of Colonel with selection based on merit.

SUBMISSIONS

Australian Defence Force

The ADF now seeks a new career structure.

The ADF submitted that the nature of medical and dental practices have diverged to such an extent that it is no longer appropriate to deal with them together. Its submission was based on the following:

- while regulation of the Dental profession has remained relatively static, the Medical profession in Australia is undergoing a radical redesign, in particular, with the introduction of the speciality of General Practice (GP);
- the difference in work value is amplified by the fact that graduate dental salaries are significantly higher than graduate medical equivalents, whereas senior medical practitioners receive, on average, significantly higher incomes; and
- the practice of dentistry is focussed on the general clinician, whereas the medical equivalent is now a specialist GP, with distinctly different work value.

In view of its submissions and evidence on these matters, the ADF submitted that there is no longer sufficiently similar work value between the two professions, neither is there a sufficiently common basis between them in terms of professional development and management requirements to justify the maintenance of the nexus between the two professional disciplines.

Capability requirements for ADF health practitioners have developed considerably since Medical and Dental Officers were last reviewed. The impact of this is that ADF dental practitioners are now first line deployment assets.

It was submitted that there has been a significant change in work value since the 1990 review of Dental Officers remuneration. This has occurred as a result of dramatic changes in technology and the clear linkage of ADF dentistry to capability requirements and the vastly changed operational environment in which the work is conducted.

The Defence Reform Project has significantly reduced the numbers of Dental Officers in the ADF across the board. It was submitted that this has resulted in a significant increase in work value because while the number of actual practitioners providing dental service to the ADF has remained relatively constant, the mix between civilian and uniformed personnel has changed significantly. The ADF contended that where previously the management workload of a dental unit was shared equitably between the officers in that unit, it is now left to fewer uniformed officers to perform those tasks in addition to their normal clinical load.

It was also submitted that concurrent with the substantial reduction in numbers, the recent upsurge in operational tempo has seen more dentists deploy more often and for substantially longer periods. Prior to the upgraded readiness policies across the ADF, dental fitness was not a specific bar to deployment readiness. The addition of dental fitness as a readiness requirement has placed an additional workload on dentists with the need to upgrade personnel and maintain them at a higher level of dental fitness.

The ADF submitted that the proposed career and salary structure for Dental Officers moves from a rank based system to one founded on competency levels with a rank overlay. This is consistent with both the Legal Officer and Chaplain structures. The career structure is based on undergraduate qualifications, four competency levels and a management stratum that requires a minimum competency level prior to entry. Core competencies have been developed to underpin the proposed structure and to support single and joint Service requirements.

It is proposed that career progression for Permanent Force Dental Officers will be through three of the four competency levels based on completion of clinical undergraduate and diploma courses. Reserve Dental Officers who hold a clinical masters degree will primarily fill the fourth competency level. Competency Level 4 will be the highest level of competency in the ADF. Above the clinical competency ceiling will be the dental management level.

The proposed competency Levels can be summarised as follows:

Undergraduate Level. This level can be entered via two extant modes, the undergraduate scheme or as a graduate entering a university dentistry program.

Competency Level 1 (CL1). CL1 provides the requisite military and clinical courses to enable service dentists to be safely employed and deployed as an unsupervised Dental Officer. Prior to progression the CL1 will be under the supervision of a CL3 officer, complete basic forensic analgesia and advanced resuscitation courses and acquire military competencies.

Competency Level 2 (CL2). CL2 is the working level for the majority of ADF Dental Officers and allows them to be operationally deployed and to work independently. Captain (E) and Major (E) are at this level. Prior to further progression the CL2 will be confirmed as a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Dental Surgeons (FRACDS) or complete a clinical diploma, acquire military competencies and qualify as a Certificate IV Workplace Assessor.

Competency Level 3 (CL3). CL3 Dental Officers provide the level of competency required for supervising CL1 Dental Officers through advanced clinical competence and formal assessment qualifications. They will also be responsible for the management of the output of CL2 Officers and for the maintenance of clinical standards. A number of CL3 Officers may be selected to attend a Masters Degree in Health Administration course in preparation for dental management level appointments.

Competency Level 4 (CL4). These officers will usually be Reservists and may be deployed as clinical specialists.

Senior Management Appointments. Officers at this level will provide both policy development and higher level guidance on health issues. They will be at the Lieutenant Colonel (E)/Colonel (E) level and will be on limited tenure appointments.

The ADF submitted that progression requirements will be established by a Dental Officer Career and Professional Development Committee.

In regard to the proposed salary structure the ADF submitted that the rates were derived from the Government salary scale for dentists in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Northern Territory and would provide appropriate remuneration for work value as well as addressing the ADF's current inability to retain Dental Officers.

The ADF advised that all serving Dental Officers have been provisionally placed against the proposed structure. The ADF has also assessed that full transition to the proposed structure will take up to six years due to the requirement for significant training, particularly at the management level.

Witness evidence was provided by Colonel G D Stacey, the Director Defence Force Dentistry and Lieutenant Colonel S J Curry, Defence Health Service Branch. Statements were provided by Commander M A Brazier; Lieutenant Commander D J Dugon; Lieutenant B J Gaffey; Lieutenant M A Page; Sub-Lieutenant K Bailey and Group Captain J A Ross.

The ADF also proposed a review of the Dental Officer Salary Structure within two years to confirm that it is meeting its stated goals.

Commonwealth

The Commonwealth supported the new structure and proposed rates. It submitted that the proposed career and salary structure would address a range of circumstances impacting on the recruitment, retention and career progression of ADF dentists as it moves away from a rank based structure and provides salary progression linked to the attainment of relevant qualifications, competencies and the exercise of professional and rank skills.

The Commonwealth also submitted that the proposal is consistent with the ADF Workplace Remuneration Arrangement: 2002 – 2004 and the principles established by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

Armed Forces Federation of Australia

The Armed Forces Federation of Australia supported the ADF proposal.

CONSIDERATION

The ADF has sought to introduce a specialist officer salary structure for Dental Officers which recognises, *inter alia*, changes in their skills and responsibilities, the changed strategic circumstances and the specialised nature of their work.

Evidence was given by Colonel G D Stacey, the Director Defence Force Dentistry on the requirement for the professional development of ADF dentists, the need for a competency based structure, the impact of the Defence Reform Project and the current nexus with Medical Officers. Colonel Stacey also submitted that the introduction of the proposed competency based career and remuneration structure would greatly assist in the recruitment and retention of Dental Officers.

It is proposed that there be a three year sunset provision to cater for situations where ADF management decides that a dental officer be posted out of stream for career management reasons for a specific period of time. In those circumstances the dental officer will continue to be remunerated pursuant to the dental officers structure for a maximum period of three years.

Having considered the submissions and evidence, the Tribunal approves the introduction of the Dental Officer Career and Salary Structure as proposed by the ADF and agreed by the Commonwealth and Armed Forces Federation of Australia. The new structure recognises the significant increase in the work value of Dental Officers since the last effective review of the category in 1990 including the expansion of their roles and responsibilities.

We consider that the factors which justify the proposed structure include:

- evidence of significant changes in the nature of the work, skill and responsibility required of the category since 1990, consistent with Principle 6 of the Statement of Principles issued by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in May 2003;
- incorporation of a competency based structure with a rank overlay;

- new rates that have been appropriately set based on benchmarking against the remuneration packages of like categories and competencies in civilian employment;
- provision for well defined career progression; and
- enhancement of the ability of the ADF to attract and retain dedicated and experienced Dental Officers (although we hasten to add that the new structure and rates are not granted for attraction and retention purposes per se).

We are also satisfied that the structure is consistent with those for Legal Officers and Chaplains previously approved by the Tribunal.

The Tribunal notes that it is the intention of the ADF to seek a review of the structure within two years to confirm that it is meeting the stated goals.

Date of Effect

The new structure and rates will apply on and from 22 May 2003.

APPEARANCES: R Kenzie QC, Defence Force Advocate, with Lieutenant Commander C Galloway, for the Australian Defence Force

M Frawley with L Cullen for the Commonwealth

G Howatt for the Armed Forces Federation of Australia

DATE AND PLACE OF HEARING:

14 May 2003

Canberra