

# English test stymies doctors

Practising doctors hit registration wall.



**DOCTOR NO:** Registration requirements under fire

**F**oreign-trained doctors living in Australia have voiced their anger and frustration at being unable to work because they are failing mandatory English tests which they claim are unfair, expensive and unnecessary.

The doctors' criticisms were aired to a parliamentary inquiry investigating the registration processes overseas medical graduates are required to complete before they can practise in Australia.

The registration processes are under scrutiny amid complaints they are onerous, expensive and a bureaucratic minefield.

Dr Michael Galak, from the former USSR, has been practising in Australia since 1981.

But he told a public hearing in Melbourne that his registration has now lapsed because under new rules he was required to sit several exams, including an English test, which he subsequently failed by half a point.

Dr Galak said the system was "chaotic" and "ad hoc". "It shifts the goal posts all the time," he said.

"My contention here is that when medical boards, the AMA included, tell us about the quality of service, about safety of patients and the consistency of assessment, the question which I have to [ask] is ... how come I was allowed to work for more than a quarter of a century as a doctor and be continuously registered?"

Dr Susan Douglas of the Overseas Trained Doctors Association told a public hearing in Canberra many doctors have complained to her that the English tests are unfair.

She said she knows of a GP who has been working in rural Australia for 10 years but is now no longer registered because she cannot meet new standards imposed.

"So this community is being denied a doctor because probably her grammar is not very good," she said.

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## LATEST

### WARNING FOR BILLBOARD ADVERTISERS

Billboard advertisers have been told by a parliamentary inquiry to toughen up their self-regulatory rules and better enforce them or face the prospect of government intervention.

The House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee has handed down its report into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising.

The inquiry was prompted by several controversial billboard campaigns in recent years such as those marketing sex performance products.

The report has made 19 recommendations aimed at strengthening the rules which govern what content can be shown in outdoor advertising campaigns.

"It cannot be turned off or put away if a consumer wishes to ignore it," committee chair Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld) said.

While stopping short of calling for complete government regulation, the inquiry has recommended various changes to the industry's self-regulating system, including a separate code of practice for outdoor ads.

And it says if sufficient change has not been made by 2013 that a "co-regulatory" system be implemented.

Advertising and industry bodies have until the end of this year to tell the Attorney-General's Department how they will implement the inquiry's recommendations.

By the end of 2012 they must again report to show what changes they have made.

The Advertising Standards Bureau is considering its response. ●

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