

AGPAL turmoil over patient outcomes

BY PAUL SMITH

THE GP accreditation agency which is calling on practices to be measured on patient health outcomes is refusing to make public its policy, claiming it will be misunderstood.

Details of the Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited (AGPAL) submission to the expert taskforce drawing up the National Primary Health Care Strategy, emerged in the *Australian* newspaper last week.

It reported that AGPAL wanted patients' clinical outcomes — in areas like diabetes and CHD — to be assessed as part of the accreditation of practices.

AGPAL was in crisis management mode last week, sending out a letter to members alleging the newspaper report contained "discrepancies".

But sources have told *Australian Doctor* that AGPAL has drawn up a roadmap for the introduction of performance measures across primary care.

Under a scheme it has started called the National Primary Care Quality Indicator Initiative, it would involve measuring GP practices by using patient quality of life surveys, and also on their provision of preventive information for smoking, obesity and alcohol consumption.

Sources said the "starting point" would be using the clinical outcomes

adopted by the National Primary Care Collaboratives program.

They said the AGPAL paper proposed running trials of an extended accreditation scheme from as early as March or April this year.

The set-up of a small working team to draft "pragmatic clinical outcome indicators and practice surgery information" was also suggested.



Primary Health Care Strategy task force. They later said they would release the document, but two hours later said it would not be released because it would be "taken out of context".

AGPAL accredits most practices according to standards laid down by the RACGP. AGPAL denied it was pushing policy on quality and safety in general practice, which was outside its remit as an accreditation agency.

Dr John Aloizos, chairman of the AGPAL subsidiary Quality in Practice, said: "The current accreditation system looks at structure and processes, how things are done. The questions that GP have always raised about accreditation was whether it really improved patient outcomes. It's a logical step to say that if those outcomes are measured then we can help answer that question."

He added: "We are not saying practices should lose accreditation if they fail to meet targets."

Although AGPAL denied it is calling for pay-for-performance in general practice, it is understood an appendix to the document suggests that Service Incentive Payments could be linked to evidence of lower BMI and BP in patients.

When contacted by *Australian Doctor*, AGPAL refused to release the submission, claiming it was up to the