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Medical Council of New Zealand | Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa
Level 24, AON Centre 1 Willis Street
WELLINGTON 6011

By email: education@mcnz.org.nz

Tēnā koe,

MCNZ - Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) Requirements for PGY1 Interns

The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (the College) is the largest medical college in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our membership of 6,018 specialist GPs and rural hospital doctors comprises 40 percent of the specialist medical workforce. The Medical Council of New Zealand accredits the College to deliver vocational training to the specialist General Practitioner and Rural Hospital Doctor workforce. We are committed to prioritising the reduction of health inequities experienced by Māori and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the rights of Māori. To do this we prioritise initiatives that support our members to develop cultural safety capabilities through our Training, Continuing Professional Development and Quality programmes.

Our members provide medical care to patients and their whānau. Each year approximately 23 million¹ patient contacts receive first point of contact care from 1,077 general practice clinical teams who effectively manage 90 percent of health concerns across Aotearoa.

Our submission

As a condition for progressing to PGY2 and obtaining General Scope Registration, the College supports maintaining the requirement for PGY1 interns to hold a current CORE Advanced level ACLS certification, issued within the last 12 months, from the New Zealand Resuscitation Council (NZRC).

The College does not support an extension of ACLS certification from 12 to 18 months to accommodate administrative and logistical challenges. While this change may be practical, it must be weighed against concerns related to skills maintenance and patient safety.

The College has a process to endorse alternative ACLS training providers. However, we note variability in curriculum and alignment with best-practice standards. Some alternative providers do not meet the high benchmarks set by NZRC CORE Advanced, which has resulted in feedback about variation in regarding course delivery and outcomes.

Resuscitation providers

Currently, the College has endorsed 25 resuscitation providers, of which six have been approved to offer alternative ACLS courses. These approved providers undergo a detailed application process and are subject to random audits to ensure quality assurance.

The College endorsement process assesses the quality of the NZRC training, and the NZRC CORE Advanced level ACLS certification provides a trusted, reliable programme and confidence of quality, consistency, and patient safety.

¹ Ministry of Health Data (2023)

The College is cautious about accepting alternative ACLS certification during the final year of medical school given the potential for skills to decline.¹ We consider the shift in responsibilities from medical student to intern, is the optimal time for interns to complete ACLS training within their PGY1 year and to reinforce the value of learning and practical application in a clinical setting.

Rationale for Maintaining the Current Requirement

1. **Standardisation of Skills:** NZRC CORE Advanced certification provides a standardised curriculum that ensures all interns have a consistent level of competency in managing life-threatening situations. Allowing alternative ACLS courses introduces variability in training quality, which could compromise patient safety.
2. **Alignment with ANZCOR Guidelines:** The NZRC CORE Advanced certification is developed in accordance with the Australian and New Zealand Committee on Resuscitation (ANZCOR) guidelines, ensuring best practice in resuscitation management. The College suggests that MCNZ could establish an evaluation framework to understand variation and ensure all courses meet the standard.
3. **Skill Retention and Practical Exposure:** Completing NZRC CORE Advanced certification during PGY1 ensures interns receive hands-on, scenario-based training in a clinical environment alongside multidisciplinary healthcare teams. This approach enhances skill retention and prepares interns for real-world emergency situations.
4. **Regulation and Oversight:** The current requirement ensures regulatory oversight and quality of ACLS training. Introducing alternative courses without an accreditation system is a risk to patients, and there is potential for inconsistencies in training standards and assessment criteria.
5. **Evidence and Patient Outcomes:** Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality ACLS training improves patient outcomes in cardiac arrest and other critical emergencies. Studies show that adherence to structured resuscitation training, such as NZRC CORE Advanced, leads to better recognition of cardiac arrest, faster initiation of life-saving interventions, and improved survival rates with favourable neurological outcomes.^{2 3 4} In addition, regular, standardised training has been linked to increased confidence and efficiency among healthcare providers, reducing medical errors and enhancing team coordination during emergencies.^{5 6} Retaining high quality ACLS requirement supports interns to be well-prepared for situations where resuscitation is required and effectively minimise preventable adverse outcomes.

The College recommends:

1. **Retaining NZRC CORE Advanced as the mandatory ACLS training:** Ensuring all PGY1 interns complete certification maintains consistency, safety, and high-quality patient care.
2. **Developing a transparent evaluation framework for alternative ACLS courses:** If MCNZ considers accepting alternative courses, it should implement a robust review process to verify equivalency with NZRC CORE Advanced.
3. **Enhancing multi-disciplinary training opportunities:** Encouraging PGY1 interns to train alongside senior medical specialists including specialist GPs, paramedics, and nurses ensures a collaborative approach to emergency response.

In summary

The College strongly recommends retaining the current ACLS certification requirement at the NZRC CORE Advanced level for PGY1 interns. Any changes to this requirement must be accompanied by clear regulatory measures to reduce variation and ensure consistency in training standards, patient safety and outcomes. The College welcomes any further discussion with MCNZ to ensure that any modifications to the ACLS requirement continue to uphold high standards of clinical competency and public safety.

If you require further clarification, please contact Suzi Imes Bryce, Senior Advisor- Professional Development, Suzi.bryce@rnzcgp.org.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Luke Bradford
BM(Hons), BSc(Hons), FRNZCGP
Medical Director | Mātanga Hauora

References

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- ⁶ Smith GB, Prytherch DR, Meredith P, Schmidt PE, Featherstone PI. The ability of early warning scores to detect clinical deterioration in hospitalized patients: A systematic review. Resuscitation. 2013;84(8):1000-8.