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AMACDT and Medical College Trainee Representatives Discuss Costs of Specialty Training in Australia

28 July 2021

Specialist Medical College Trainee Committee Chairs and Representatives met on 28 July 2021 to discuss costs of specialist vocational training. The meeting welcomed the Medical Board of Australia, the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and an independent researcher, all of whom presented to the meeting on issues relating to costs of training.

The majority of College Trainee Representatives agreed that College training fees were clearly listed on College websites, noting this was useful for current and prospective trainees.

The meeting acknowledged that changes to assessment modalities to meet COVID-19 requirements had impacted both positively and negatively on costs of training and recognised the need for ongoing flexibility for Colleges to meet training requirements. Trainees considered how Colleges were communicating with trainees about costs of training, particularly increasing costs, and engaging with trainees to manage costs.

Trainees noted it was not uncommon for costs of training to be different according to which state/territory training was being undertaken and recommended Colleges work toward national consistency in training requirements and training costs within specialties. The meeting discussed costs of accreditation, and the majority agreed that the costs of maintaining accreditation should not be borne exclusively by trainees.

While the majority of Trainee Representatives agreed that the costs of their training program were reasonable, they were less likely to agree that costs were transparent and readily explained to trainees and more likely to agree that training costs impacted on the financial and personal wellbeing of trainees.

There was strong support for the AMC to review and strengthen accreditation standards regarding the transparency of training costs.

Below is a summary of the main discussion topics:

More transparency about how fees are apportioned

Trainees would like Colleges to evaluate the transparency of their fiscal arrangements, actively demonstrate how training fees are apportioned, and for the detail about how fees are spent each year

to be easily accessible and communicated in an easy-to-read format. The meeting agreed that this information would be useful for both trainees and fellows.

In agreeing to this, Trainee Representatives acknowledged that further discussion is required as to what increased transparency looks like but suggested this could be achieved by providing trainees with:

- a breakdown of the college training fee and the rationale behind any fee increases
- an annual financial report of income and expenses relating to training and assessment
- better engagement and communication with trainees about managing the costs of training.

Financial wellbeing/hardship policies are recommended

Trainee Representatives agreed that all Colleges should have in place a financial wellbeing/hardship policy for trainees to account for times when personal and/or financial circumstances change and/or training costs are high. This should include options for monthly payments at no additional cost, concessions for part time training or other forms of less than full time training, deferment of examination/assessment costs due to financial hardship etc.

Supporting trainees in financial hardship is part of an overall strategy to achieve diversity in medicine and will allow those who would otherwise be unable to afford certain training pathways, to be able to participate in their specialty training program of choice.

The costs of reconsideration, review and appeals processes needs review

Trainee Representatives asked that a review of the costs of reconsideration, review and appeals processes be considered by all Colleges. In general, current costs range from \$1-10K and are seen as being prohibitive for natural justice processes to follow especially for vulnerable trainee populations including medical parents, international medical graduates and others with financial hardships. Models should include provision to have the costs of appeals waived if the appeal is successful.

The following Medical College Trainee Committee Chairs/ Representatives attended the Forum:

- Australian Medical Association Council of Doctors in Training
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- Australasian College for Dermatologists
- Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
- New Zealand Medical Association
- Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

- Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists

Apologies:

- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- College of Intensive Care Medicine
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The next meeting will be held in October 2021.

The AMACDT Trainee Forum is designed to increase collaboration between Specialist Medical College Trainee Committees and enhance cross specialty communication. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact us at cdt.chair@ama.com.au