



AMACDT and Medical College Trainee Representatives discuss training through the pandemic – lessons learnt and the way forward in 2022

2 February 2022

Specialist Medical College Trainee Committee Chairs and Representatives met on 2 February 2022 to discuss the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on specialist medical education and training.

At the first AMA Trainee Forum of the year, Dr Vijay Roach, Chair, Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC), introduced the role of CPMC, highlighting the focus and goals of CPMC in 2022. Further, Dr Robyn Langham, Chair, Australian Medical Council (AMC) Specialist Education and Accreditation Committee (SEAC), supported by Mr Philip Pigou, Ms Kirsty White and Ms Juliana Simon, outlined the role of accreditation in supporting quality medical education and training.

Trainee Forum discussion on the pandemic's influence on specialist medical education and training

Trainees identified a range of initiatives implemented by Medical Colleges that have been successful in supporting trainees to progress through training during the pandemic

Trainees agreed it was important for Specialist Medical Colleges and trainees to strengthen collaboration to better share examples of policies and practices (both positive and negative) that have supported trainees to progress through training during the pandemic, and to discuss how this could continue as part of usual practice moving forward

Trainees acknowledged the immense challenges COVID has posed to all Colleges, staff, trainees, and fellows regarding trainee progression through training, and appreciated the ongoing commitment and support from the Colleges to allow this to occur.

In this the third year of the pandemic, trainees emphasised the importance of Medical Colleges and trainees learning from past experiences, sharing successes and failures, and working collaboratively to improve education and training, and to future proof systems to the extent possible against further disruption.

Examples of positive initiatives implemented during the pandemic by Colleges:

- Shift to high quality competency-based assessment.

- Shift to virtual/online examination and assessment platforms and modalities.
- Shift to online exam preparation.
- Decoupling of examinations to allow progression.
- Fair retrospective assessment pathways to allow trainees to progress through training/to fellowship.
- Running examinations in local/state-based locations rather than in a single, centralised location.
- Adopting COVID safe protocols to allow examinations to run locally/in state-based locations.
- Sharing protocols developed by Colleges between Colleges to support examination and assessment e.g., transparent COVID safe protocols communicated before examinations in a timely manner.
- Developing robust and multi-scenario contingency plans including back up examination dates so protocols are in place before hand to manage interruptions to training/examinations/assessment and communicating this in advance so that it is clear to trainees, College staff, supervisors, and fellows about what will happen.
- Confirming early with State/Territory Chief Health Officers exemptions/provisions to allow examinations to occur with adequate forward planning.
- Developing clear, transparent, and accessible policy and criteria about how training can progress e.g., attempt criteria - where attempts are/are not counted and flexibility in time requirements to meet competencies.
- Flexibility in what does/does not count toward training and leave e.g., in the case of redeployment, Covid leave etc.
- Involving trainee committees/trainee representatives in key decisions that affect them as and when they occur and involving them in the development of communications before they go out to all trainees to ensure the right tone and content.

Areas to keep working on:

- Low examination pass rates, particularly considering the impact of new formats, ability to prepare, etc., and be ready to adapt to support trainee progression.
- Managing the impact that COVID-19 has had on volume of practice and clinical time, attendance at mandatory courses and/or deployment to COVID wards, and competition for access to procedures where they have been reduced Greater involvement and consultation of trainees regarding changes to assessment, developing contingency plans and in communications to trainees, particularly where there is short notice of changes to assessment.
- Developing clear guidelines on pre-examination COVID testing with clear contingencies so that trainees are not disadvantaged and progression through training is not affected by a positive result.
- Increased focus on ensuring and supporting wellbeing - for trainees, College staff, supervisors, and fellows – which should always form part of any consideration regarding change or response.
- Ensuring trainees are well represented on Medical College governance and education structures, are consulted with, and listened to, is important to successfully manage this transition.

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 for Emergency Medicine
- Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
- 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 Australasian College of Physicians

Apologies:

- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- College of Intensive Care Medicine
- New Zealand Medical Association
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

The next meeting will be held on 28 April 2022.

Previous AMA Trainee Forum communiques:

- [COVID-19 and its Impact on Specialty Training 1 June 2020](#)
- [Examination Processes 11 Aug 2020](#)
- [Contingency Planning for Exam Technical Failures 19 October 2020](#)
- [Best Practice in Trainee Representation, Engagement and Communication 28 Jan 2021](#)
- [College Assessment April 2021](#)
- [Costs of Training July 2021](#)
- [Processes for selection into training 26 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