



AMACDT and Medical College Trainee Representatives discuss College Initiatives to Support Trainee Wellbeing

11 August 2022

The third AMA Trainee Forum of the year was held on 11 August 2022. AMA Council of Doctors in Training (CDT) Chair, Dr Hannah Szewczyk, facilitated a discussion on *college initiatives to support trainee wellbeing* with trainee representatives and trainee chairs from Specialist Medical Colleges and Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association attending.

Reflections and Discussion

Medical trainees experience elevated levels of burn out and other wellbeing issues that are often caused or exacerbated by structural norms and policies that disregard or minimise the importance of trainee wellbeing. Examination processes, flexible training options, and access to suicide postvention were identified as three key factors affecting trainee wellbeing.

Trainees also discussed issues regarding college supported mentoring programmes and financial wellbeing. Colleges are encouraged to ensure governance structures meaningfully support and resource wellbeing initiatives and policies. Trainees discussed the need to translate wellbeing policies into action and reflected that often trainees are unaware of college wellbeing policies.

Specialist Medical Training Colleges can foster a greater sense of identity, safety and satisfaction between the trainee and their College through meaningful and tangible investments in trainee wellbeing. The Trainee Forum discussions reiterated the need for, and benefits of trainees being integrated and represented on college education and governance committees.

Examination processes: The Trainee Forum acknowledged that examination processes are a major source of stress and anxiety for many trainees. Trainees commended Colleges for their innovation earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic by allowing hybrid or virtual examinations. Trainees highlighted the benefits of hybrid exams especially for those in rural and remote areas, those with family responsibilities, and those with cultural needs or duties. Exclusively face to face examinations may interfere with trainee work/life balance and may present as a barrier to some, especially those living in rural and remote areas who experience a greater financial burden of travel expenses. Trainees supported a transition away from high-stakes, one-off barrier exams to alternate forms of assessment such as work based assessment.

Further, trainees are urging Specialist Medical Colleges to provide detailed and personalised feedback after exams. This will support trainees in identifying their knowledge gaps and provide trainees with the opportunity and confidence to improve their skillsets following examination. Trainees also described the

importance of Colleges allowing trainees to privately process their exam results with appropriate time and supports as needed.

Flexible work and training options: Trainees agreed there is a need for greater flexibility within medical training. Colleges must facilitate and support trainees to take leave or train part-time, and work with employers to implement and report of flexible work and training arrangements. Trainees noted that the onus is often on trainees to facilitate part-time training by finding a doctor to job share with. Trainees also reported that there is often a stigma attached to those training part-time or taking leave. Part-time training, parental leave, cultural leave, sick leave and ensuring trainee work/life balance are the responsibility of colleges and employers.

Development of postvention strategies: Trainees acknowledged that many Specialist Medical Colleges and employers do not have suicide postvention strategies or policies in place. Suicide is often unexpected, with an immediate impact on friends and colleagues. Colleges and employers must develop strategies and policies to compassionately support and respond to those bereaved by suicide.

Examples of positive initiatives implemented by colleges:

- CPD points for self-care or wellbeing activities
- Wellbeing working groups
- Formal mentoring programs
- College support for flexible training options
- Training modules for mental health for doctors
- Counselling lines and advertising of the DRS4DRS service
- Professional career training/coaching
- Financial, legal and indemnity assistance
- Wellbeing workshops
- Training for potential supervisors and mentors
- Trainee representation on college councils, committees and boards

Areas for colleges to improve:

- Colleges supporting sick, parental, or extended leave
- Exam support
- Exam feedback
- Supporting flexibility in training
- Burnout prevention and support
- Workplace culture
- Mentoring networks or programs

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

- Australian Medical Association Council of Doctors in Training
- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Apologies:

- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- Australasian College for Dermatologists
- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
- College of Intensive Care Medicine
- Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

The next meeting will be held on 20 October 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](#)
- [Training through the pandemic—lessons learnt and the way forward in 2022 7 February 2022](#)
- [Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainees Progress Through Training to Fellowship 28 April 2022](#)

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

The AMACDT, chaired by Dr Hannah Szewczyk, represents medical trainees throughout Australia and advocates for equitable and safe outcomes for trainees and their patients.