

Transcript: AMA Vice President, Dr Danielle McMullen on ABC News Radio Friday, 25 November 2022

Subject: AMA's new report, The General Practice workforce – why the neglect must end.

HOST CHRIS MITCHELL: Now, can you imagine a longer wait at your GP? You might already be waiting a while. But I'm afraid it could become a new reality. The Australian Medical Association has found that the country will face a severe GP shortage, about 10,000 in fact, in the next decade. That's what they found in a new report. AMA Vice President Danielle McMullen told ABC NewsRadio's Sonia Feng that the workforce is at breaking point.

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: That's a staggering number and really highlights how much we need to invest in general practice and our future workforce and address those push and pull factors to make sure that we've got enough GPs to look after Australians into the future.

SONIA FENG: Over the years, there hasn't been enough of a workforce for the demand that Australia needs?

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: Exactly. We've found that that shortage is being driven by increased demand for GP time. Part of that is from a growing population, but also more complex illness needing more time with the GP and more appointments. On top of that, we're also seeing less students pick general practice and more GPs reaching that age of retirement. So overall, we're ending up with a really staggering shortage of GPs in the next decade.

SONIA FENG: How will the workforce sort of adapt?

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: So we need a number of solutions. We do need to address the factors to make general practice an attractive career and make sure that medical students and doctors in training are picking a career in general practice. But we also need to support GPs better to spend more time with their patients including after hours, and we want to work together with pharmacists and psychologists and physios and other allied health as part of a really collaborative team to deliver more care to patients, including those in aged care facilities.

SONIA FENG: I don't know if you've found any difference between the regions and capital cities?

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: So we've known for a long time that workforce shortages always start in rural areas, and so our rural and regional colleagues have been feeling the pinch for a long time now. We're now also seeing that in outer metropolitan and metropolitan areas, but we do have an urgent crisis to fix in workforce in rural and remote Australia and a longer-term crisis to fix across the rest of the country.

SONIA FENG: To plug in that shortfall, pharmacies are taking a bit more of a load.

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: Exactly, and we do want primary care teams to be working together and to let all health professionals work to their breadth of practice, and make sure that patients are getting the right care from the right person at the right time. But part of that needs to be improving access to general practice, not knee-jerk reactions to attempt to fill a gap. We're seeing state governments across the country now scrambling to try and plug this demand by letting pharmacists prescribe medications, and we are concerned that that will bring worse health outcomes to patients and that it's a short term, badly thought out, knee-jerk reaction type fix when we really need long term solutions to improve access to GP-led care teams for patients.

CHRIS MITCHELL: Danielle McMullen, the AMA's Vice President, warning of a severe shortage of GPs.

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