



AMACDT and Medical College Trainee Representatives discuss College Initiatives to Support Flexible Training

The first AMA Trainee Forum of the year was held on 23 February 2023. AMA Council of Doctors in Training (AMACDT) Chair, Dr Hannah Szewczyk, facilitated a discussion on *college initiatives to support flexible training* with trainee chairs/representatives from Specialist Medical Colleges attending.

Reflections and Discussion

All medical colleges provide the opportunity for trainees to access and complete training flexibly. However, due to structural and cultural issues, trainees find that requesting and organising flexible training is difficult, leading to poor uptake. Often trainees are placed with the burden of negotiating their own terms of flexibility and support with not only colleges, but also with employers. All medical trainees should have easy access to flexible training supports with assistance from medical colleges.

Flexibility in training includes, but is not limited to, policies such as availability of part-time work, the provision of parental, medical and cultural leave, and additional supports for doctors with disability, and those returning to work after extended periods of leave. Medical trainees are adult learners who should be assessed by competency, rather than adhering to strict training time limits. Training is often tied with employment, so colleges should ensure that all policies are consistent with Fair Work and anti-discrimination legislation.

Positive flexible training initiatives implemented by colleges:

- Availability to complete all training in a rural, regional or remote area.
- Updating parental leave policies to be gender neutral and reflect diversity of family structures.
- Providing clear, consistent, and long-term arrangements and supports for trainees returning to work after extended periods of leave.
- Updates to policies to include training interruptions for wellbeing. This includes options for part-time training or full-time training with a break in assessments.
- Development of parental support guidelines, including options for lactating parents during examinations.
- Pro-rata fees for part-time training.
- Option to take time (usually 12-months) off to complete research that does not contribute to training time.
- No caps or maximum time for parental leave.
- Exclusion of medical leave from training time caps.
- Reduction on the minimum training FTE that can be accredited (0.2FTE) to support gradual return to work.

- Implementation of return to training plans after taking more than 12-months of leave, instead of the trainee completing additional assessment.
- Progression through training accredited in weeks instead of 3-month blocks.

Areas for colleges to improve:

- Availability of part-time training at less than 0.5 FTE.
- Some colleges do not offer part-time trainees pro-rate fees.
- More flexibility around total training time caps to support trainees to take leave as required.
- Flexibility to defer examinations if the trainee is on, or returning from extended parental, personal or medical leave.
- Fees associated with applying for special considerations during examinations.
- No guidelines for altered working conditions for various considerations, e.g., pregnancy, working night shift.
- Physical disability is under recognised in flexible training policies, often resulting in no clear policies existing. Individuals must seek accommodations and exemptions on a case-by-case basis.

Other barriers to flexible training:

- Some training sites do not allow for job sharing (due to accreditation).
- The onus is on trainees to find someone to job share with. In colleges with small numbers of trainees, this is very difficult.
- Trainees that are not represented on college committees and boards with voting rights have limited influence on flexible training policy.
- For trainees outside of the hospital system, paid leave entitlements, including paid parental leave, are difficult to access due to short rotations in private business (no accrual of leave).
- Mandatory rotations into rural areas can disadvantage some trainees and reduce options for flexible training.

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

- Australian Medical Association Council of Doctors in Training
- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- Australasian College for Dermatologists
- Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- College of Intensive Care Medicine
- Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Apologies:

- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association

- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
- Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators

The next meeting will be held in May 2023.

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](#)
- [College Initiatives to Support Trainee Wellbeing 11 August](#)
- [College Initiatives to Support Trainees to Live and Work in Rural Areas – 20 October 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