



AMACDT and Medical College Trainee Representatives discuss College Initiatives to Support Women in Healthcare Leadership

The second AMA Trainee Forum of 2023 was held on the 18 May and co-hosted with the Advancing Women in Healthcare Leadership (AWHL) research team. AMA Council of Doctors in Training (AMACDT) Deputy Co-Chair, Dr Elise Buisson with AHWL researcher Dr Jenny Proimos, facilitated a discussion on college initiatives to support women in healthcare leadership with trainee chairs/representatives from specialist medical colleges attending.

Reflections and Discussion

Patriarchal attitudes are deeply embedded in medicine and medical training. Australian specialist medical colleges can both provide barriers and pathways for women in healthcare leadership. Trainee chairs discussed a wide range of factors that can create a supportive working and training environment for all trainees across and beyond the gender spectrum. Key themes emerging from the discussion included access to childcare, support for return to work, access to flexibility in training, and having in place visible role models for female and diverse leadership. Emerging from the discussion was the importance of trainees being actively consulted and communicated with the governance and decision making regarding their training. Trainees should be represented in all high-level College governance and decision-making structures including boards and committees.

It is important to note that this communique uses the term 'women' broadly. The AMA acknowledges that these experiences are also applicable to individuals that do not identify as women, including trans, gender-diverse and non-binary people. Further, people's experiences within medicine and medical training are affected by other intersectional factors such as race, age, sexuality, abilities, amongst others.

Access to childcare

Trainee chairs identified that poor access to childcare is a key barrier for medical parents of young children. Many doctors in training in specialist training programs live transitory and varied lives. This includes shift work, on call hours, weekend work, and short-term placements that require regular moving. Often individual doctors in training do not have the power to challenge working conditions and training requirements. These burdens place considerable pressure on medical parents and are compounded by the increasing cost and inaccessibility of childcare. Many medical parents often rely on the goodwill of family, friends, informal carers, or even paid nannies.

Support for return to work

Trainee chairs noted the importance of return-to-work policies and procedures for trainees returning from extended leave. Return-to-work policies allow people returning from injuries, parental leave, breaks due to wellbeing, or any other extended leave to receive a supported and eased process to regular working

conditions and hours. This is especially important for trainees returning to procedural work. Trainee wellbeing and confidence will be maintained and grown through supportive and open processes.

Flexibility and leave in working and training

A continuing barrier within the medical training experience for women is the inaccessibility of leave and difficulties in establishing and maintaining flexible and part-time working. Trainees are often asked to organise and implement their own flexible working arrangements. Colleges and employers must have in place clear and accessible procedures for part time and flexible working. Further, applying for and accessing leave should not be onerous for the trainees. Colleges are encouraged to ensure access to pathways and processes that support access to flexible working arrangements are included in site accreditation of training places.

Another issue emerging from the discussion was the intersection between part time and flexible training and the costs of training. Trainees felt it was unreasonable to be required to pay a premium training fee while on extended or parental leave. These themes were also explored in the AMA's first Trainee Forum of 2023 – [College Initiatives to Support Flexibility in Training](#).

Role models and visibility

Women are underrepresented in leadership roles within medicine and medical training. As the doctor in training cohort has become increasingly diverse, so should college leadership and representative structures. Having women in visible leadership positions is a powerful tool to encourage greater diversity within the training cohort and improving the diversity in representative voices. Greater diversity within leadership will bring a wider range of perspectives and experiences that can influence and inform positive policy and training changes.

Positive initiatives implemented by colleges:

- Site accreditation of training places standards that ensure return to work policies, flexible training, and access to breastfeeding facilities
- Mentorship programs for women in medicine
- Colleges having women in medicine special interest groups
- 40/40/20 gender representation split for college committees, boards, and groups
- Women occupying visible leadership roles within college
- Updating parental leave policies to be gender neutral and reflect diversity of family structures
- Flexibility in how training time is counted

Areas for colleges to improve:

- Reducing barrier to accessing flexible or part-time training
- Reducing barriers to accessing parental leave
- Introducing part-time trainees pro-rate fees
- Liaising with trainees, especially medical parents on changes to their training times
- Providing advance notice of placement timings

About the Advancing Women in Healthcare Leadership Project

Advancing Women in Healthcare Leadership (AWHL), based at the Monash Centre for Health Research and Implementation (MCHRI), Monash University, is a large-scale national research, implementation and impact initiative supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Partnership Project grant (APP1198561) and contributions from partners, including the Australian Medical Association. AWHL in coproduction with partners is generating a knowledge base and delivering multi-faceted organisational and individual level interventions that measurably improve career progression for women in healthcare.

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

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

Apologies:

- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- College of Intensive Care Medicine
- Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The next meeting will be held in August 2023.

Previous AMA Trainee Forum communiques:

- [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](#)
- [College Initiatives to Support Flexibility in Training – 23 February 2023](#)

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