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AMA CALLS FOR EXPANDED SPECIALIST TRAINING PROGRAM

The AMA is calling for a significant expansion of the Commonwealth Government’s Specialist Training Program (STP), which provides funding to support specialist training posts in non-traditional settings such as the private sector.

In a submission responding to a Department of Health Discussion Paper, the AMA makes a strong case that the STP is making a valuable contribution to supporting the quality of specialist training, and there is scope to do more.

AMA President, Professor Brian Owler, said that highly-regarded medical workforce modelling undertaken by the former Health Workforce Australia (HWA) showed that Australia now has enough medical school places, but the challenge is how best to distribute the medical workforce.

“We should now be trying to improve the distribution of the medical workforce and encouraging future medical graduates to train in the specialties where they will be needed to meet future community need for healthcare services,” Professor Owler said.

“The HWA modelling predicted that large numbers of doctors in training will not be able to get the training posts they need to enter specialist training.

“HWA predicted a shortfall of 569 first-year advanced specialist training places by 2018, rising to 689 places in 2024, and rising further to 1,011 places in 2030.

“This training bottleneck will cause problems right down the training pipeline because growing numbers of doctors in training will be stuck in prevocational training and competing for the limited number of available pre-vocational training places.

“The AMA recommends that the Government should expand the number of STP places from 900 to 1,400 places by 2018, and to 1,900 places by 2030.”

The AMA submission emphasises the need to continue to ensure that a strong educational focus is put on STP placements, and recognises that the STP can play a positive role in addressing workforce shortages in particular specialties and geographic areas.

The AMA recommends that priority is given to funding posts in those areas of the medical workforce that need boosting, in particular:

- rural training
- generalist skills, and
- specialties that are under-supplied.

In relation to rural training, the STP has generally only supported one-year placements for doctors in training. In this regard, the AMA highlights that the structure of the program needs to be altered so that it can support coordinated long-term pathways for trainees interested in pursuing rural careers.

The AMA submission recommends using STP funding to help establish regional training networks, particularly where they can be linked to existing infrastructure such as rural clinical schools.

Background

Medical training in expanded settings is an increasingly important adjunct to the public teaching hospital model that has served Australia well over many years.

The Specialist Training Program (STP) is a Commonwealth Government program that gives junior doctors who are undertaking specialist training the opportunity to train in settings outside traditional metropolitan teaching hospitals.

From these settings, trainees can acquire the skills and knowledge from learning experiences that are not generally available in conventional training environments to help meet the standards required to become a Fellow of a recognised specialist medical college.

The Minister for Health is consulting with stakeholders on potential reforms to the STP. As part of the consultation process, the Department of Health has released a Discussion Paper on the current design of the program. The AMA was one of the stakeholders invited to make a submission.

The AMA submission is at <https://ama.com.au/submission/submission-review-specialist-training-program>

15 October 2015

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