

2015 AMA Trainee Forum: Summary and outcomes

The annual AMA Trainee Forum was held in Sydney on 21 February 2015. The event provided an opportunity for vocational trainees from across the country to discuss current and emerging issues in specialty education. Almost 40 doctors in training attended, including representatives from the college trainee committees.

This year's forum featured a number of interactive sessions including presentations from senior doctors, academics and vocational trainees all recognised for their expertise in the topics covered. Participants had the opportunity to discuss the issues covered in depth. The main outcomes are outlined below.

Session 1: The role of the trainee in the future of health care in Australia

This session explored what reforms might be necessary to train a medical workforce capable of meeting Australia's future health care needs. **Professor Stephen Leeder**, the editor of the *Medical Journal of Australia* suggested that the ageing of the population, combined with advances in technology, communication of information, and increasing capacity to process information, would be the most significant drivers of change in medical practice over the next 20 years. He proposed that one of the most important challenges facing future medical practice would be retaining humane concern and advocacy in the face of these technological advances.

Mr Robert Wells of the Sax Institute outlined the policy interventions used by governments to manage health costs including caps on funding and workforce interventions. He suggested that the major challenges facing medical practice in the future would be keeping up to date with best-evidence based practice, and managing patient expectations for bells and whistles care along with the pressures to contain costs.

Prof Andrew Wilson of the Menzies Centre for Health Policy challenged those present to think about the validity and suitability of the current model of medical training and whether it produced doctors with the skills and competencies necessary to meet future health care needs and support generalist practice. Importantly, will it provide the diversity of skills and competencies needed in the future? Participants discussed how the pressures on the health system affected medical career choices now and how they will in the future, ways to achieve a balance between best practice, cost of care and patient expectations, and the need to balance technology and access to care with best practice and medico-legal complications.

Session 2: The great service registrar vs. accredited registrar debate

Two teams debated the topic "Should all service registrar positions be converted to accredited training posts irrespective of future medical workforce needs? **Dr Kathryn Austin**, Fellow of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, argued for the conversion of all service registrar positions to accredited registrar positions from a workforce perspective. She maintained that service registrars were an inefficient and expensive way to utilise and grow the medical workforce. **Dr Michael Symes**, an Orthopaedic registrar and NSW representative for the Australian Orthopaedic Registrars' Association, argued that unaccredited service positions gave doctors a solid foundation prior to joining a vocational training program and suggested there was not the capacity in Australia's health infrastructure to convert service registrar positions into accredited registrar positions.

Dr Rob Mitchell, an Emergency medicine registrar, argued that the educational experience provided in service registrar posts was sub-optimal. He suggested that all service posts should be converted into vocational training and/or resident positions, with any unmet demand for clinical services be met by consultants or alternative health professionals. **Dr Bradley Horsburgh**, President of the Royal and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, argued that downgrading training programs or lowering average competency by reducing clinical exposure was not the solution to workforce oversupply, maintaining that graduates in some specialties had finished their training having undertaken fewer clinical procedures than graduates 20 years earlier. While

no winner was declared, attendees agreed the debate was an entertaining and thought-provoking way to consider how the future workforce might be trained.

Session 3: Trainee soapbox: The top three issues requiring advocacy in 2015

Trainee committee chairs were able to raise specific policy issues and give voice to their concerns with vocational training. The top three priorities identified for advocacy were:

- securing jobs for new fellows, particularly in the public sector, and addressing the maldistribution of trainees and fellows.
- providing access to wellbeing and support services and safe working environments.
- maintaining work-life balance and getting access to flexible, part-time work arrangements.

These will help to drive the AMA's advocacy in 2015:

Session 4: Review of the approved accreditation standards for specialist medical programs and continuing professional development programs

Ms Theanne Walters, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Australian Medical Council gave an overview of the review process to date, including the context of the review, the content of the revised standards and the timeline for implementation. Ms Walters advised that a number of new standards would require the colleges to:

- report where patient safety concerns are raised.
- report and act on outcome evaluations.
- report on trainee wellbeing.
- have a CPD program available to all specialists in the discipline.

Participants discussed with Ms Walters the potential for the standards to allow non-medical supervision, adequately defining the term 'employer' to cover a range of training settings, and how the standards could encourage rural training opportunities.

Release of 2014 AMA Specialist Trainee Survey Report

Dr Stephen Parnis, AMA Vice President, and **Dr Danika Thiemt**, Chair, AMA Council of Doctors in Training, released the report of the 2014 AMA survey of hospital-based specialist trainees and general practice registrars. Dr Parnis said that the 2014 survey showed how trainees felt the quality of training was being maintained in the face of rising numbers of trainees. Managing career expectations, promoting a safe and healthy workplace, and better integrating high-quality prevocational and vocational training pathways were areas identified for ongoing commitment to ensure Australia continued to produce highly qualified doctors.

Dr Thiemt said that the 2014 STS showed that career choice, level of supervision, standard of training, clinical experience, and access to safe working hours are areas where trainees continued to have a high level of confidence. Areas that had remained unchanged since 2010 included responsiveness to cases of bullying and harassment, feedback, appeals and remediation processes, and the cost of training. GP registrars were more positive about their training program, most notably employment prospects at the end of training, costs of training, health and wellbeing, access to flexible training options, relevance and quality of educational activities, and recognition of prior learning. The report is available [online](#).

In closing, Dr Thiemt acknowledged the contributions of those present, and reiterated the the Forum's value in drawing together ideas and opinions from each speciality and providing a cohesive voice on medical workforce and training issues.

Dr Danika Thiemt
Chair, AMA Council of Doctors in Training
March 2015