



The Royal Australian
College of General
Practitioners

General practice

Connecting the dots for
students and junior doctors



It's your future

As you go through medical school, and even after graduating, you are faced with many choices about your medical career. There is an array of opportunities, but it comes down to what speciality strikes a chord with your interests, and what lifestyle you prefer.

This guide will help clarify some questions you may have about general practice as a speciality, and provides you with important information about what a career in general practice entails, the steps you need to take to become a general practitioner (GP) and what options are available in the general practice career.

About 06

10 Pathway

Fellowship 16

18 Options

RACGP 22

23 Contacts



About

What is general practice?

General practice is the provision of patient centred, continuing, comprehensive, coordinated primary care to individuals, families and communities. It is the cornerstone of the Australian healthcare system.

In 2010, general practice was acknowledged by the Medical Board of Australia as a medical speciality.

Who is a GP?

A GP is a registered medical practitioner who:

- is qualified and competent for general practice anywhere in Australia
- has the skills and experience to provide whole person, comprehensive, coordinated and continuing medical care, and
- maintains professional competence for general practice.

Australia's GPs work in all parts of Australia ranging from large cities and rural towns, to remote settlements in central Australia. There will always be a need for GPs and as other disciplines continue to sub-specialise, more and more complex general medicine is falling into the domain of general practice.

6 reasons to be a GP

A career in general practice is a rewarding and intellectually stimulating career that offers many professional and personal benefits.

Here are 6 reasons to be a GP:

Opportunity

General practice allows you to broaden your medical career – you can choose to make your areas of specific interest a prominent part of your practice or you can explore other options such as research, locum work and much more.

Flexibility

General practice offers flexibility in the hours of work and the pace of training. Choose when and where you work, and how much or how little you work to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

Diversity

As a GP, you need to use and adopt the full breadth of clinical content to be able to diagnose, treat and manage the medical needs of the whole person. You're not focusing on just one organ or one part of the body.

Continuity of care

One of the most rewarding aspects of general practice is the relationship you build with your patients. General practice has more patient contact than any other specialty. Some GPs deliver the grandchildren of the children they also delivered.

Portability

You can practise a wide range of skills including procedural and hospital care in the city, a rural setting, or overseas. The skills you develop are portable, providing you with many possibilities.

Variety

No two days in general practice are the same, and no two patient presentations are either. When you really know your patients, even a simple presentation becomes deeply interesting.



“I chose to be a GP because of the flexibility in hours, the fact that I could choose the location I wanted to work in, and the ability to sub-specialise. Being involved in the patient’s everyday life and working on health prevention is very rewarding.”

Dr Angela Forrest, GP
(Tasmania)

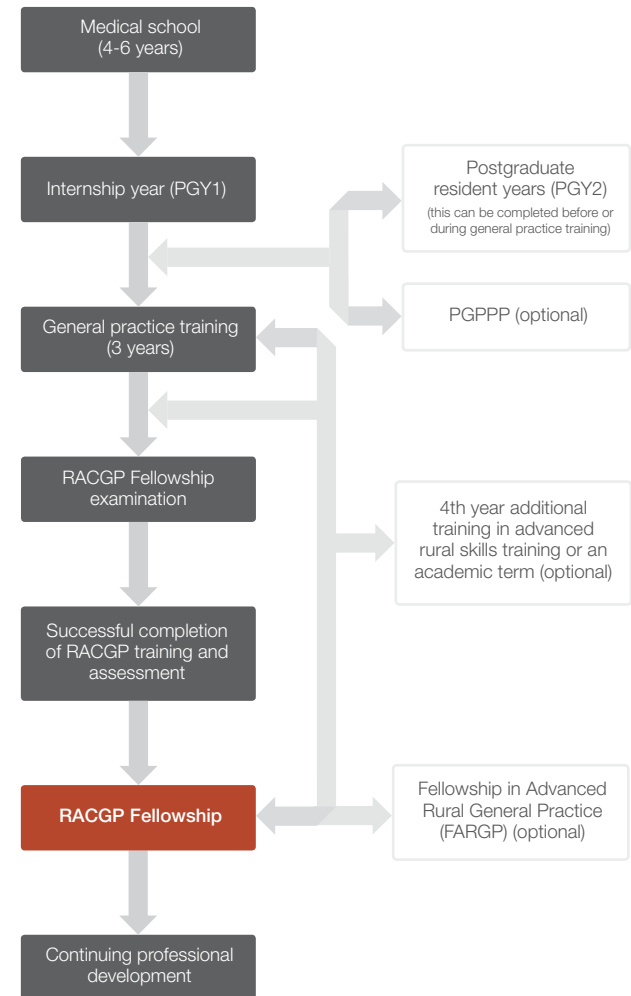


Pathway

In order to practise as a GP in Australia, all graduates need to undertake training and complete the assessment process of one of two colleges: The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM). The RACGP is the largest general practice organisation in Australia, and is the national leader in setting and maintaining the standards for quality clinical practice, education and research in Australian general practice. Here is an outline of the journey towards general practice for medical students and junior doctors in Australia, starting from your internship year, and until you are a qualified GP (RACGP Fellow), and beyond.

For further details about the RACGP see page 22.

The RACGP journey towards general practice (via the vocational training route)



Internship year

During your final year of university, you need to apply for your internship year (PGY1). The PGY1 is primarily spent in public hospitals and/or community settings and consists of rotations that provide practical experience in each of the speciality areas of Australian medicine. Postgraduate Medical Councils (PMCs) in each state/territory are responsible for developing the education and training requirements for the internship year and can assist with the matching and application process to hospitals in your state/territory.

For more information visit www.cpmec.org.au

If you decide that a career in general practice is the career for you, then you can apply for general practice training in this year and commence your first year of training in the second year after graduation.

If you're not sure if general practice is for you, a great way to get a real taste for general practice is through the Prevocational General Practice Placements Program (PGPPP).

See below for details.

Postgraduate resident years

While there is no requirement to complete hospital residency (PGY2) prior to entry into general practice training, some junior doctors choose to undertake 1–2 years of hospital residency before committing to a specialist training program. If you do complete additional hospital experience after your internship year, you may be eligible for recognition of prior learning once you commence general practice training.

Prevocational General Practice Placements Program

The PGPPP is a great way for you to get a real taste for general practice and is available to junior doctors who are not yet enrolled in a specialist training program.

The PGPPP involves working in an outer metropolitan, regional, rural, or remote general practice environment, for an average placement of 12 weeks. This well supervised placement counts toward your hospital training

component of the RACGP general practice training pathway and allows you to gain a sense of autonomy in your health care management skills. The program aims to build your confidence, experience and interest in general practice, increase your understanding of the vertical integration between primary and secondary healthcare, and encourages you to be better informed about general practice before deciding on your chosen career path.

Visit www.agpt.com.au/PrevocationalTraining/PGPPPHome

General practice vocational training

Vocational training towards RACGP Fellowship is 3 years full time (or part time equivalent), with an optional fourth year for additional skills and qualifications in rural general practice. There is great flexibility in when and how the essential components of training can be completed, as well as the ability to do part time training and take up to 3 years of leave.

The essential components of vocational training towards RACGP Fellowship are:

Hospital training (12 months)

There are four compulsory hospital rotations for general practice training: general medicine, general surgery, emergency medicine and paediatrics. To complement this, you also need to complete three hospital rotations of your choice, provided they are relevant to general practice.

General practice placements (18 months)

The 18 months of general practice placements need to be completed in approved teaching practices, and include a compulsory term (minimum of 6 months) in an outer metropolitan area or rural and remote area.

Extended skills (6 months)

The 6 months extended skills provide an opportunity to develop your general practice skills further, and can be completed in a range of RACGP approved settings. Options include advanced rural skills, an overseas post, an academic post, or extended procedural skills within a hospital or practice.

Applying for vocational training

Vocational training in Australia is managed and delivered by two bodies – General Practice Education and Training (GPET) and the Remote Vocational Training Scheme (RVTS). These organisations deliver the training according to the standards set by the RACGP. Once you have decided that general practice is your desired career path, you will need to apply for training through GPET or RVTS.

GPET is the largest general practice training organisation and offers both a general and rural stream of general practice training. The RVTS delivers training only in remote and isolated communities to a smaller group of registrars.

GPET

Applications for Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) are usually open between May and June for training to commence in the following calendar year. If a second round of applications are offered, this usually takes place around August, September or October. There will be 812 training places for the GPET intake in 2011.

The AGPT application process involves:

- an online application (via www.agpt.com.au)
- a printed application supported by certified documentation
- interviews with regional training providers, based on merit ranking, training preference and availability of training placements. Suitability assessment and merit ranking at 'selection centres' may also apply for some regions.

The AGPT is delivered through regional training providers (RTPs) in each Australian state/territory.

For further details on the AGPT program, or to apply, visit www.agpt.com.au/ApplyforAGPT/NewApplicants



RVTS

The RVTS delivers structured distance education that includes weekly teletutorials, twice yearly education workshops, remote supervision and individualised training advice. There will be 22 training places for the RVTS intake in 2011.

Enrolments for RVTS open in May and September for training to commence in the following calendar year.

For further details on the RVTS program including full eligibility criteria, visit www.rvts.org.au/applicants.aspx

Fellowship

RACGP Fellowship

The RACGP's Fellowship program is held in high esteem around the world, with successful completion certifying competence to deliver unsupervised general practice services in any general practice setting in Australia – urban, regional, rural or remote. The international recognition of the RACGP Fellowship is expanding, now being recognised in New Zealand, Ireland, Canada and Singapore. The RACGP conjoint Fellowship examinations continue to be delivered in Malaysia and Hong Kong.

The College examination

For registrars, the College examination is the assessment requirement for RACGP Fellowship (FRACGP). It comprises two written segments – the applied knowledge test (AKT) and key feature problems (KFP), and a clinical segment – the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE).

Each segment can be completed and paid for separately, so you have the flexibility to undertake the Fellowship exams at your own pace. Passing the AKT is a prerequisite to presenting for the OSCE. All three exams need to be completed within a 3 year period of first passing a written exam.

Registrars may enrol in the AKT after completing six active units in Australian general practice training, if this is supported by their medical educator, and two of these active units must be from completion of general practice term 1 (also known as the basic term). However it is highly recommended that they sit the examination after completing eight active units of general practice training. Candidates must complete eight active training units to enrol in the KFP and the OSCE.

RVTS candidates are eligible to enrol in the College examination following satisfactory completion of 12 months in the RVTS, in addition to the standard RACGP eligibility criteria.

To find out more about the College examination, including the full eligibility criteria, visit www.racgp.org.au/exam



Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice

If you have an interest in rural and procedural practise, you can complete a fourth year of advanced rural skills training and work towards a second RACGP Fellowship – the Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP). The FARGP (pronounced 'far-GP') recognises advanced rural skills and additional training undertaken by GPs in preparation for practise in rural and remote Australia.

To be eligible for the FARGP you must complete 12 months of advanced rural skills training. You may choose to complete an advanced rural skills training post in an area of interest or of value to a rural community. The FARGP is designed to assist you in developing further competence and confidence for practise in rural and remote Australia. You can undertake the FARGP while completing your RACGP Fellowship, enabling you to complete two highly respected RACGP Fellowships in 4 years.

Options



General practice offers an array of diverse options, so you can focus on areas of your interest or tailor your career to suit your work/life preference. The following are some opportunities which you can explore during your RACGP general practice training, and which you may be able to expand on later in your career.

Areas of specific interest

A career in general practice allows you to pursue other areas of specific interest during your training and practise. If you have a clinical interest in diabetes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, paediatrics, anaesthetics or palliative care (just to name a few) you can choose to sub-specialise as a GP in that area. If you wish to take these skills further, you can also do a diploma or masters through other specialist colleges. For example, you can complete a Diploma in Obstetrics via The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, or a Certificate of Primary Care Dermatology through the RACGP's partnership with The Australasian College of Dermatologists.

To find out more, contact a regional training provider in your state visit www.racgp.org.au/gpet

To foster the specific interests held by GPs, the RACGP has established a National Faculty of Specific Interests. This faculty provides you with the opportunity to share knowledge and develop materials with other members who have the same interests.

To find out more visit www.racgp.org.au/nfsi or call 1800 090 588

“What I like most about general practice is the fact that it’s not just about being clinically competent, but it’s about developing and establishing a good and trusting relationship with your patients. The immense variety in the medical presentations that one has to face brings constant challenges to one’s practise.”

Dr Marlene Kong, GP
(New South Wales)

Research

Research enables you to develop valuable skills to take into your clinical work and could act as a stepping stone towards an academic career. There is widespread agreement that research in general practice is essential for the improvement of patient health care outcomes. Evidence also shows that when those working in primary care are involved in research, there is an increase in the quality of care provided as well as faster dissemination and adoption of research evidence.

During your general practice training there are a range of research opportunities to help you find the level of research that is right for you. Get involved in a project by contacting your university or the RACGP Foundation that handles all research, including grants and awards. You can also apply for an academic term under the RACGP pathway and work part time in a university department and part time in clinical general practice. An academic term can either be completed as an extended skills post or as optional additional training time and can sometimes count toward a higher degree (eg. Master of Medicine or a PhD).

Visit www.racgp.org.au/researchfoundation or contact the RACGP Foundation via email at research@racgp.org.au

Overseas posts

If you are interested in gaining experience abroad the RACGP's training pathway can include completion of your general practice training overseas as part of an extended skills or advanced rural skills term. Typically this is a 6 month full time position, although application can be made for a part time post. Please note that there are restrictions on when, in your training pathway, the overseas training posts can be accepted as part of your training and you need to obtain the prospective support of your regional training provider and prospective approval from the RACGP Censor in Chief.

Contact a regional training provider in your state or visit www.racgp.org.au/vocationaltraining/standards for more details.

If you are unable to undertake overseas posts during your vocational training, you may choose to practise overseas for a few months after you complete your Fellowship. The portability of general practice as a medical speciality, combined with the international recognition of the FRACGP makes this an exciting possibility.

Rural general practice

Rural general practice is a great career option. The unique geographical and demographic features offer the chance to manage complex health presentations, and to use advanced skills such as emergency medicine, obstetrics, anaesthetics, and mental health.

Advanced rural skills training

If you decide that you want to become a rural GP or have a strong interest in rural general practice and want to take your training and education further, you have the option to complete an additional 12 months of advanced rural skills training (ARST). You can undertake this at the same time as you prepare for your FRACGP and FARGP.

ARST areas include anaesthesia, obstetrics, surgery, emergency medicine, mental health, child and adolescent health, adult internal medicine, small town rural general practice and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The RACGP National Rural Faculty

Due to the unique geographical and demographic features of rural and remote Australia GPs are required to manage many complex health presentations. The RACGP National Rural Faculty (NRF) provides specialised services to support the specific needs of GPs working in rural and remote locations.

The faculty is responsible for the FARGP award, a formal qualification that recognises advanced rural skills and additional rural general practice training undertaken by GPs. RACGP members practising in rural and remote locations are automatically provided with NRF membership. All other RACGP members who have an interest in rural general practice are also invited to join the NRF on a complimentary basis. The RACGP has the largest rural and remote membership of any medical college in Australia.

The RACGP advocates that the most effective and sustainable option for rural primary care services is to focus resources on development and maintenance of well supported general practice.

Rural incentive payments

The Commonwealth Government has developed a number of incentive programs to encourage medical practitioners to practise in rural and remote communities and to promote careers in rural and remote medicine:

- rural retention payments – regular payments that increase with remoteness and length of service
- rural relocation grants – payments for relocating from one area to another area of greater remoteness
- procedural training grants – procedural and emergency medicine GPs practising in rural and remote areas may be eligible to receive financial assistance for skills maintenance and development in their respective disciplines.

Visit www.racgp.org.au/rural or contact the RACGP National Rural Faculty on 1800 636 764 for more information about rural general practice, FARGP, the NRF and rural incentive payments.

RACGP

The RACGP is Australia's largest professional general practice organisation and represents urban and rural GPs. We represent over 21 000 members and are proud that over 17 000 GPs in Australia have chosen to be a member of our College.

The RACGP has been supporting GPs for over 50 years, and is the national leader in setting and maintaining the standards for quality clinical practice, education and research in Australian general practice.

As a professional specialist medical College, we serve with integrity, strive for excellence, foster general practice unity, advocate for health equity and embrace the diversity of our profession.

The RACGP national office is located in Victoria, with faculties in every Australian state or territory. The College also has a dedicated National Rural Faculty, National Faculty of Specific Interests, and National Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. The RACGP offers support to members for their entire journey of general practice, starting from when you are a medical student, throughout your training, and right until you retire.

To find out about the membership options available, visit www.racgp.org.au/membership

Qualified GP and beyond

Once you are qualified to practise unsupervised as a GP in Australia you need to continue to undertake continuing professional development throughout your medical career to maintain your professional standing. The RACGP's Quality Improvement and Continuing Professional Development (QI&CPD) Program enables vocationally registered GPs to maintain their recognition status with Medicare Australia.



Contacts

RACGP Membership

Tel 1800 331 626

Email membership@racgp.org.au
www.racgp.org.au/membership

RACGP Fellowship

www.racgp.org.au/assessment

Prevocational General Practice Placements Program

www.agpt.com.au/PrevocationalTraining/PGPPHome

RACGP National Rural Faculty

Tel 1800 636 764

Email rural.admin@racgp.org.au
www.racgp.org.au/rural

RACGP National Faculty of Specific Interests

Tel 1800 090 588

Email fsi@racgp.org.au
www.racgp.org.au/nfsi

RACGP National Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Tel 03 8699 0499

Email aboriginalhealth@racgp.org.au
www.racgp.org.au/aboriginalhealth

General Practice Education and Training (GPET)

Tel 02 6263 6777

Email gpet@gpet.com.au
www.agpt.com.au

Remote Vocational Training Scheme (RVTS)

Tel 02 6021 6235

www.rvts.org.au