



THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Ensuring the Quality of Australia's General Practitioners

The RACGP is responsible for setting and maintaining the standards for education and training in Australian General Practice. This role has been endorsed through accreditation by the Australian Medical Council.

The RACGP has the only entry standard to Australian General Practice, the Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (FRACGP). The RACGP is also responsible for ensuring the quality assurance and continuing professional development of Australia's general practitioners through our QA&CPD program. The RACGP stands by these standards.

The quality of our general practitioners is central to the quality of the care delivered in General Practice. Quality also depends on the system in which general practitioners work. The system is failing Australian General Practice and the Australian public by not requiring all those entering General Practice to achieve FRACGP and undertake continuing professional development.

The FRACGP has been the required entry standard for general practice since 1996. All Australian medical graduates are required without exception to achieve the FRACGP prior to entry into unsupervised general practice. This requirement must also apply to all doctors entering general practice, regardless of origin or route of entry if Australian standards of care are not to be undermined.

The RACGP will not compromise the fundamental integrity of the FRACGP and its assessment processes which have been strongly endorsed by the Australian Medical Council in its recent accreditation of the RACGP.

In August 2003 the RACGP joined the Australian Medical Association in recommending that the General Practice Representative Group encourage the Commonwealth to instruct the Health Insurance Commission to accept applications to join the Vocational Register from those GPs who were first recognised as medical practitioners prior to 1 November 1996 and who have practiced predominantly in general practice for a total of five years or more.

The convocation of members of the RACGP held in Hobart in October 2003 voted unanimously that GPs being admitted in this manner to the Vocational Register be required to attain FRACGP within three years.

The Commonwealth has taken aspects of the recommendations of the RACGP and AMA on board via programs to support non-vocationally registered doctors and their patients announced in the Medicare Plus package.

In response to the Medicare Plus package, the General Practice Representative Group, comprising the ADGP, AMA, RACGP and RDAA, has stated its support for the concept of higher rebates for patients of non-vocationally registered general practitioners who were practising prior to 1996, but believes that this should be extended beyond areas of workforce shortage and tied to a commitment to meet College standards for continuing professional development. The GPRG has also stated that these doctors need to be encouraged and supported to attain Fellowship of the RACGP.

While it is up to the Commonwealth to determine the criteria for admission to its vocational register, the RACGP re-iterates that it will provide, and seek, additional support for non-vocationally registered doctors to attain Fellowship, ideally within five years.

The RACGP will also engage non-vocationally registered doctors in the current review of the Practice Based Assessment route leading to FRACGP to ensure that this is responsive to the realities of the busy experienced general practitioner aspiring to attain FRACGP.

The RACGP believes that this move will also ensure ongoing participation in continuing professional development by this group of general practitioners. It will also bring the Medicare rebate for patients being treated by these doctors into line with the Medicare rebate received by other patients. Different rebates for different groups of patients based on choice of general practitioner are leading to significant disparities in equity of access for many people in Australia.

However there remains a problem with Government policies which undermine our nation's standard for high quality General Practice. The RACGP through its standards is protecting the quality of care the Australian community receives through General Practice. The Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments need to demonstrate how they can guarantee to protect entry standards to General Practice and protect the Australian community

The competency of permanent resident overseas-trained doctors for unsupervised work in general practice is not assessed through the Australian Medical Council examinations.

For doctors on Temporary Resident Visas working in Australian General Practice, there are often no entry standards at a level acceptable to the RACGP, including no requirement to pass the AMC examination. There is also often no formal requirement to participate in continuing professional education activities. The RACGP calls on Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to ensure that all doctors working as general practitioners in Australia meet appropriate Australian standards before they are able to practice medicine in Australia, and that those working in general practice meet the standards for continuing professional development required by the RACGP.

In response to these concerns Council has supported an RACGP Summit on Entry Standards for General Practice to seek advice on ongoing development of RACGP standards for education and training, in light of the recommendations of the Australian Medical Council accreditation.

The influx of overseas-trained doctors into Australian General Practice will likely continue as a result of current Government policy. However, the challenge remains for the RACGP to work with other General Practice organisations – and with Government, to ensure that General Practice is an attractive career destination for Australian graduates.

The RACGP has a requirement under the Australian Medical Council accreditation to establish a formal Working Party of overseas-trained doctors to represent the needs of overseas-trained doctors in general practice, with appropriate opportunities for contribution to College policy development and decision-making structures.

This working party will be required to assist the RACGP to work with the Australian Medical Council, the Medical Boards and the Commonwealth to establish a process to identify overseas-trained doctors so that they may be encouraged to join the RACGP and thus be professionally supported. The working party will assist the RACGP to develop a clear and transparent procedure for appeals by overseas-trained doctors. The working party will be required to assist the RACGP develop a formal support network to facilitate mentorship and support whilst recognising the various needs of overseas-trained doctors.

The Working Party will include doctors who trained overseas and who have the FRACGP, who are successfully completing mandatory CPD and who support the roles and responsibilities of the RACGP.

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