

Australian GP registrars as teachers:

A qualitative study



RACGP
Royal Australian College
of General Practitioners

This summary of findings has been prepared for practice managers and general practitioner (GP) supervisors.

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Why we conducted this research

Research suggests that most GP registrars want to teach during training and that there are considerable benefits.¹⁻³ However, there are barriers for registrars to teach, including inadequate funding, time pressures and limited training opportunities to develop teaching skills. Existing evidence does not include Medical Educator (ME) perspectives or compare teaching contexts (eg in practice vs. university).

Our research method

Our team conducted interviews with 15 registrars, 10 supervisors and one ME. We also performed two focus groups, with four MEs and five medical students respectively. Recruitment was open to participants nationwide and we interviewed a varied sample. The registrars interviewed taught across multiple settings, including in practice, universities, hospitals and educational workshop days. Three registrars had experience in a GP academic post, and one had experience in a registrar ME role.

What we learnt

We generated four key themes from the information provided:

Value of near-peer teaching: Participants identified benefits from near-peer teaching for both registrars and junior learners (medical students and junior doctors). For registrars, this included increased confidence, improved clinical knowledge, and benefits for examination preparation. Medical students identified registrars as approachable and more likely to involve them as part of the team. Medical students also described registrars' practice as evidence-based, which they found helpful for their university assessments.

"I found the registrars were a lot more willing to get me involved and actually discuss consults and some of their thought processes, whereas the senior GPs it was more just sitting and observing. And whenever we had free time, they were a lot more willing to teach me." – Medical student

Teaching makes you a better GP: MEs and GP supervisors noted the transferability of registrars' teaching skills to their clinical practice, commenting that this enhanced their patient care. Registrar participants were cognisant of this, noting that teaching medical students helped them to better teach their patients.

"Every patient encounter is teaching. You're teaching your patients. I don't think you can practice in the community as a GP without being a teacher as well. I think learning how to teach...is absolutely vital to being a GP." – Supervisor

Multi-stakeholder engagement: Participants noted that support at multiple levels is needed to better engage registrars in teaching roles. Proposed measures included practice and supervisor support, remuneration for teaching, university support for medical education pathways and RACGP accreditation for teaching to count towards training time. Participants were divided over teaching being a compulsory part of the training curriculum, acknowledging that not all registrars should teach, particularly if they are struggling to meet their own training requirements. However, registrars also noted that unfounded assumptions about teaching capacity were often made.

"I think asking registrars if they want to teach. I think people just assume registrars are so busy with the exams and trying to get their head around GP training, that they don't actually get asked." – Registrar

Strengthening the GP workforce: Registrars saw teaching as a way to improve the reputation of general practice and increase medical student and junior doctor interest in GP training. Registrars and educators also noted that a mix of clinical and educational work improved job satisfaction and career sustainability, with most registrars commenting on the risk of burnout when working in a clinical role full-time. Educators also saw registrars as teachers as a necessary proponent of succession planning for the future medical education workforce.

"The other thing I liked about [teaching] was, while I love clinical work, it reduces the clinical load because I'm happy to work full-time, but full-time clinical work in GP land is tiring." – Registrar

What this means

Our findings suggest that teaching is a valuable skill for registrars that has transferability to their clinical work. However, additional support is needed to facilitate registrars as teachers on a larger scale. These include involvement in teaching opportunities in practice, remuneration (eg Practice Incentive Payment for teaching), and protected time (eg 'catch-up' appointments when teaching). We will be sharing our findings with relevant stakeholders, including teaching practices and GP supervisors, medical educators and universities.

For more information

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