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The AMA's National Doctors-in-Training Publication

Issue 51 - December 2007



AMA

The AMA Council of Doctors in Training (AMACDT) is a national AMA Group that represents junior doctors through a hospital and state-based representative structure. The AMACDT held its most recent quarterly meeting in Canberra on 13 & 14 October 2007.

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BMP Scheme

The AMA has been lobbying the Government to introduce changes to the unfunded bonded medical places (BMP) scheme. The AMA has highlighted evidence showing that similar overseas schemes are ineffective.

In a welcome move the Government recently announced the introduction of more balanced arrangements for medical students participating in the scheme. All current BMP students will be able to sign onto modified contracts that relax their duration, tenure and return of service obligations. Specifically:

- the length of the bonded service equals the length of the medical degree;
- up to half of the return of service can be met while completing either pre-vocational or vocational training; and
- you can apply to stay in a District of Workforce Shortage from the time you commence your vocational training.

The AMA still believes that more changes are required, including more incentives such as scholarships and HECS relief.

Debating medical education and training at anzMET

The Inaugural Australian Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Forum (anzMET) took place on 28-31 October 2007.

The AMACDT was well represented at the forum with Dr Alex Markwell speaking on work-life flexibility for doctors, junior doctors and junior doctor education, training and supervision in hospitals, and Dr Andrew Perry presenting on core terms in internship, from a junior medical officer's perspective. Dr Markwell also contributed a poster presentation on training in alternative settings. Dr Markwell was recognised for making the most significant contribution to junior doctor education at the conference.

The AMACDT had several representatives at the event and was pleased to see that much of the debate at the conference was consistent with many of the themes being pursued by the Council - including the challenge of dealing with training in a broader range of clinical settings.

Spreading the word at the Doctors' Health Conference

On 24-27 October 2007 an international doctors' health conference was held in Sydney. Topics of special interest included:

- creating a healthy work environment;
- achieving a work life balance;
- self care
- issue for medical students and doctors in training;
- maintaining employment in a medical career;
- healthy ageing for doctors; and
- international collaboration on matters of doctors' health.

During the conference, AMACDT Chair, Dr Alex Markwell, facilitated a session specifically targeted at junior doctors and students. This session proved popular with participants discussing solutions to address doctors' health such as:

- better debriefing of junior staff both formally and informally;
- better mentoring of junior doctors and students through the introduction of training programs for mentors which encourage trusting and safe environments;
- increased focus on the changing dynamic of medicine with mature age and graduate medical degrees bringing different challenges for the protection of the health of the cohort; and
- a change to proactive rather than reactive solutions that are utilised system-wide and not dependent on individual training sites or doctors making sure systems are in place.

The AMACDT is currently developing more resources on doctors' health and hope to be in a position to release more details early in the new year.

AMA supports medical training in expanded clinical settings

Federal Council has passed an AMACDT-sponsored position statement on medical training in expanded clinical settings. The AMA supports the introduction of a scheme to facilitate training in expanded settings, although Federal Council has set out a range of principles to ensure that junior doctors, supervisors, patients and public hospitals are not disadvantaged.

The position statement can be viewed at:

<http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-7955S8>

Guide for prospective medical students

The AMA publication, *Becoming a doctor and bonded medical school places - a guide for prospective medical students* is publicly available for download from the AMA website at www.ama.com.au

Community Placements – Accommodation and Appointment Standards

AMA Federal Council has passed an AMACDT-sponsored policy paper dealing with accommodation and appointment standards for doctors undertaking work in community placements. With increased medical student numbers, there is no doubt that a growing number of medical students and doctors will be undertaking training in community settings.

The statement recognises that the accommodation of doctors undertaking community placements is vitally important in ensuring a positive experience for the doctors and their families during their placed period.

The statement addresses various items including relocation assistance and provision for doctors with families and can be viewed at:

<http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-7956K9>

AMA Survey on Junior Doctor Education, Training and Supervision

The AMA, in conjunction with the AMA Queensland Council of Residents and Registrars, recently piloted an on line AMA survey on junior doctor education, training, and supervision.

An early analysis of the data has revealed junior doctors in Queensland believe that hospitals could do much to improve their performance in areas such as:

- access to a range of education and information resources appropriate to their clinical practice needs;
- access to computer facilities;
- access to office space;
- participation in useful team-based meetings such as case presentations on a regular basis;
- adequate and appropriate supervision in all work situations; and
- a mechanism for consultation with, and feedback from, junior doctors regarding their work and training.

The AMA is looking to repeat the survey in other states as part of an ongoing campaign to improve training and education for junior doctors.

More GP Training Places

The AMA has called for \$100 million over four years to support the training of medical students in general practice and is lobbying the government for a commitment to investing in training in the public sector for the increased number of medical graduates.

Northern Territory EBA Negotiations

Dr Alex Markwell, Chair of the AMACDT, recently visited the NT to assist junior doctors in EBA negotiations. Doctors in the NT have voted *No* to the Government's offer, which reflects concerns about the lack of pay parity with other states and the ongoing loss of specialists from the Territory health system.

HECS Scheme Fails to Attract Young Doctors to Country Practice

A Government scheme to attract young doctors to work in rural areas has failed to realise its potential, with less than half the funds allocated to the HECS Reimbursement Scheme being spent in 2006-07. The scheme offers doctors working in rural and remote areas an opportunity to claim back one fifth of their HECS fees for each year of service in these areas.

The AMA has been calling for a significant revision of the Bonded Medical Places Scheme, which currently offers no incentives for medical students to practice in areas of workforce shortage.

The AMA believes that HECS relief should be an upfront and fundamental part of the Bonded Medical Places Scheme, as it stands, to provide students with some tangible incentives and rewards for committing to work in rural and remote communities.

Physician Assistants

The role of junior doctors in the Australian healthcare system is being threatened by the prospect of Physician Assistants. Such a role jeopardises clinical training places for medical students, which are already in short supply. AMA Federal Council, consistent with AMA Federal Council resolution 7766-3 of May 2007, opposes the establishment of any course to train Physician Assistants and the importation of Physician Assistants from overseas.

General Practice Students Network (GPSN)

The GPSN was recently established as a joint initiative of General Practice Registrars Australia Ltd (GPRA) and the Australian Medical Students Association Inc. (AMSA). The organisation consists of student ambassadors from each medical school in Australia to represent the GPSN's interests locally.

The GPSN has commenced work on developing a student guide for General Practice rotations, a discussion paper on optimising General Practice rotations and a survey to evaluate student perceptions and attitudes pertaining to General Practice.

Bonded Medical Places Working Group

The AMA is supporting the newly formed Bonded Medical Places Working Group (BMPWG). The aim of the group is to provide a basis for a future support scheme that the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine will be coordinating from the end of 2007 for bonded students. Feedback from this group will assist the AMA and the Australian Medical Students Association (AMSA) to lobby for further changes to the BMP Scheme.

Overview of state and territory rural workforce programs and initiatives

The AMA maintains a detailed overview of state and territory rural workforce programs and initiatives. The overview is an initiative of the AMA Rural Reference Group and is available at: <http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-74Z2XY>

Happy New Year

As this is the last edition of E-dit for 2007, we wish all readers a happy and safe New Year.

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The AMACDT is established as a Committee of the Federal Council of the AMA and reports directly to Federal Council on issues of importance to junior doctors.

Junior doctors who want to contact their State/Territory AMACDT representative can do so via the above contact details.