



# AMA Trainee Forum Meeting Communique Tuesday 11 August 2020

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## AMACDT AND MEDICAL COLLEGE TRAINEES DISCUSS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EXAMINATION PROCESSES

11 August 2020

- AMACDT and Specialist Medical College Trainee Chairs and Representatives met via video conference to discuss College initiatives underway to allow vocational trainees to succeed with examinations and progress through training during COVID-19. Attendees acknowledged the impact of prolonged low-level stress and anxiety on trainees and College staff because of the significant disruption to examination processes and schedules caused by COVID. Trainees recognised and appreciated the efforts made by Colleges, supervisors and examiners to support trainees progress through training during this difficult and uncertain time.
- Trainees agreed that ensuring the safety of trainees, supervisors, examiners and the public; maintaining the validity of examinations; and providing a consistent examination experience to the extent this is possible, were paramount when taking action to support as many trainees as possible to progress through training.

### Principles to guide further action

- Trainees shared feedback about the [implementation of measures to support trainees to sit examinations](#) and the [wellbeing of trainees](#),\* noting the response to COVID-19. Considering the varying level of restrictions in place across the country and the uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of the pandemic, the meeting discussed the following strategies to guide further action on examination format, delivery, progression through training and wellbeing of trainees.

\*Link to feedback based on a survey of trainees who attended the Forum.

### Provisions should be made for online/virtual delivery of exams wherever possible

- In an environment where traditional and face to face patient viva/clinical exams are unlikely to be practical for some time, trainees encouraged Colleges to consider alternative forms of examination and assessment (including workplace-based assessment), especially for graduating fellows.
- Trainees agreed Colleges should strive to deliver both written and clinical exams locally, via online/virtual delivery where possible. The format should be supportive of trainees whilst taking into consideration each state and territory's COVID restrictions. Where possible, exam locations should be decentralised rather than occurring in one central location. Adequate contingencies should be in place to manage technological issues and fluctuating COVID restrictions.
- Where travel is required and/or it is deemed appropriate to run an exam in a central location, COVID safe practices must be in place to protect trainees and staff and importantly minimise the risk of community spread from metropolitan to regional areas and farther between states and territories.
- Where examinations are offered in an alternative format, Colleges should offer to run several information sessions so that candidates become familiar with the new format. Resources should be provided to allow trainees to prepare for exams and practice examination techniques. Using online platforms to provide as much training/teaching as possible is encouraged.
- Creative alternatives to face to face practice cases for clinical exams are encouraged including using iPads/tablets to allow trainees to run a consultation with patients virtually, using previous trainees to act as patients, sharing online patients for example between groups of trainees for clinical exams, and using photographs and other forms of media as appropriate substitutes to physical patients.



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- Trainees should be given at least 3 months notice of any major changes that occur. However, where an exam is unable to proceed due to COVID restrictions, trainees should be advised with as much notice as possible to reduce the anxiety caused by multiple rescheduling of exams.
- Given the nature of COVID and its significant impact on education and training, trainees supported a non-punitive approach being applied to examination attempts. This includes being able to withdraw from sitting exams without a penalty fee and without unsuccessful exam attempts counting.

### Early, regular, transparent, and effective communication about changes

- Trainees emphasised the importance of early, accurate, unambiguous and timely communication so that they are aware of changes as they occur and have an opportunity to ask questions and to clarify processes; this will minimise anxiety and uncertainty around exam processes and progression through training.
- Trainees supported Colleges' efforts to openly engage and consult with trainees regarding changes to exam processes. Colleges should strive to conduct regular webinars and/or open online forums/workshops with trainees to discuss the current situation and any proposed/actual changes to exam processes with opportunities for trainees to ask questions about changes.
- Regular communication and updates via email, social media, with links to a frequently asked questions webpage, to both trainees, supervisors and examiners were highly rated by trainees as preferred means of communication. Surveys of trainees to gauge views on proposed changes were also considered useful.
- Each College should work towards having a structure in place that seeks the views and input from fellows, trainee representatives and College staff about issues and options for exam conduct and communications during COVID-19. Trainee representation on such College COVID response working groups should be sufficient to achieve diversity in trainee representation, perspectives, and reactions.

### Ongoing collaborative work to improve wellbeing

- Trainees agreed that uncertainty about exam processes and progression through training is a major cause of anxiety for trainees and that this is hard to manage in the current COVID environment.
- Trainees supported the development of the following initiatives to support trainees who have had interruptions to their training in the last 6 months:
  - Mentorship programs to support current trainees and new fellows who have graduated in the COVID environment.
  - Establishing Trainee Support Units to specifically help with managing wellbeing.
  - Flexible approaches regarding pauses from training and accreditation.
  - Broader engagement and regular and clear communications with trainees
  - College statements to trainees via the President regarding understanding how difficult the situation is and encouragement to access support such as a training support unit, additional employee assistance program sessions and doctors' health advisory services.
  - Monthly checking in with trainee representatives to monitor trainee wellbeing and feedback.
  - Understanding of special circumstances as well as consideration of reduced costs / financial hardship provisions.



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### Next Steps

Trainees agreed to meet regularly to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on training. The next meeting will be held in October 2020.

The online forum had input from the following Medical College Trainee Committee Chairs/Representatives:

- Australian Junior Medical Officer Committee
- Australian Medical Association Council of Doctors in Training
- Australasian College for Dermatologists
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- Avant Mutual
- College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand
- General Practice Registrars Australia
- New Zealand Medical Association
- Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- Royal Australasian College of Pathologists
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

The AMACDT Trainee Forum is designed to increase collaboration between Specialist Medical College Trainee Committees and enhance cross specialty communication. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact us at [cdt.chair@ama.com.au](mailto:cdt.chair@ama.com.au)