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Training places must meet demand for doctors, says New Medical Deans' President

Demand for doctors is outstripping the supply of new graduates worldwide and it will deepen if enough clinical training places for Australia's future doctors are not found, says incoming President of Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand Professor James Angus.

Professor Angus, who has been elected President of Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand – the body that represents the leaders of Australia's 18 medical schools and two in New Zealand – said Australia can't be complacent about training its medical workforce.

"Doctors are in demand everywhere, in every country," Professor Angus said.

"We still don't have enough clinical training places to train interns and specialists. Does Australia have a fully developed plan to leverage both public and private facilities for training? The answer remains "no".

Professor Angus – also Dean of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne – takes up his two-year appointment as President at the Medical Deans' Annual General Meeting in Canberra on Wednesday 17 June.

The Deans have been campaigning for several years for more facilities such as private clinics to be utilised as settings for students to train with real patients.

"We've got ageing populations demanding more from the health system, consumers expecting high quality, workforce maldistribution – rural needs versus metro bias, indigenous health, increasing specialisation. We have a lot of demand, especially for primary carers (general practitioners).

"If we are to meet it, we will still need to import doctors through migration and will have to hang on to as many of the domestic students we train here as we can. There are a lot of incentives for doctors to go to another country.

"This is a global problem. I understand every doctor who graduated in New Zealand last year found a job outside New Zealand."

Professor Angus said doctors with families are not willing to work around the clock as in past generations, while safety limits on how many hours they can spend on the ward were also impacting on workforce planning.

He paid tribute to outgoing President Professor Allan Carmichael for encouraging governments to respond to the crisis in training facilities.

"Allan Carmichael did some very hard yards in getting everyone focused on the reality that you need more than a university to train doctors – you need hospitals, private facilities, specialist colleges – a big range of settings – and it all needs to be integrated, planned and funded."

He said there has been a good deal of progress under successive Health Ministers but a major increase in medical school enrolments had added to the demand for clinical training places. "We need to keep looking hard at this," he said.

“The Deans, governments and specialist Colleges have to work together, because it is going to compound as the population ages.”

Other issues Professor Angus intends to focus on during his two-year tenure as Medical Deans President are:

- * Integration of medical training phases
- * Exposure of all medical students to clinical research
- * The role of the general practitioner as primary carer
- * E-health and patient “ownership” of their health records
- * Training an indigenous health workforce
- * The Medical Schools Outcomes Database (MSOD) project
- * Major government reviews including the NHHRC reforms
- * Communication

“Communication is crucial,” Professor Angus said. “If you can’t communicate, you can’t be a doctor.”

Biography of Professor James A Angus, BSc (Syd.) PhD (Syd.) FAA

James Angus was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne in July 2003. Before becoming Dean, he was Professor and Head of the Department of Pharmacology and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences. At the University of Melbourne, Professor Angus has been President of the Academic Board (2000-2001) and Pro Vice-Chancellor (1999-2001).

Professor Angus was awarded the Gottschalk Medal of the Australian Academy of Science (1984), is a Fellow of the Academy (FAA) and has been a member of its Council. In 2003 he was awarded Australia’s Centenary Medal for contribution to Pharmacology and the Community. Professor Angus was a First Vice-President of the International Union of Pharmacology (IUPHAR) and was President of the Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists.

His current roles include directorships of the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute, Bionic Ear Institute, Mental Health Research Institute, Melbourne Health, Centre for Eye Research Australia, Victorian Institute for Forensic Medicine, National Ageing Research Institute, and Victor Smorgon Institute at Epworth Pty Ltd. He serves the Australian Government as Chair Australian Health Information Council, and the Rhodes Trust, Oxford as the Honorary Secretary, Victorian Rhodes Scholarship. He served on the Council of Melbourne Grammar School (1991-9).

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