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Doctor numbers set to soar

The number of new doctors trained in Australia is set to jump sharply in the next few years, with graduate numbers set to more than double, according to statistics unveiled today.

'There is a serious shortage of doctors in Australia, especially in rural areas, and this is a tremendous step to redressing the deficiency,' said Professor Jim Angus, the President of the Medical Deans of Australia and New Zealand.

'While we welcome these new doctors, this rapid increase creates a new set of challenges — and we must meet these challenges to ensure our world-class medical standards are not compromised.'

Australia had 1,335 medical graduates in 2006 (not including international students), and this number is set to jump to 3,108 in 2014, as new medical schools come on line and increased numbers at established schools move through their programs.

Professor Angus said a two-day meeting beginning today in Sydney would seek to address key issues about how to deal with the 'tsunami of doctors' coming from Australian's universities both for the immediate and longer-term. Central to this is a looming shortage of training places and doctors to conduct the training.

'If you double the size of any industry over a few years it will create headaches, especially in a profession where there is so much training involved,' Professor Angus said.

The Medical Education Conference, MedEd09, Investing in our Medical Workforce will be attended by representatives from Medical Schools, Junior Medical Officers, Medical Colleges, key medical organisations and Commonwealth, State and Territory Health Departments. Sir John Tooke, who recently led the Independent Inquiry into Modernising Medical Careers in the UK, will deliver the keynote address.

'The federal government is well aware of the rapid changes in doctor numbers and is actively taking part in these discussions, which will look at a range of solutions for creating a more flexible workforce, for improving transitions across the training continuum and for organising health systems to provide the most effective training environments for our young doctors,' Professor Angus said.

'These include creating a significant number of training places in settings outside of the traditional teaching hospital in major capital cities, including private hospitals, and expanding the training that young doctors can do in general practice,' he said.

'This is a critical time for discussion, and devising solutions – and most timely so as to inform the roll out of the Commonwealth's billion dollar injection of new funds into the health workforce.'

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