

1 February 2010

Letter to the Editor

Adam Cresswell and Matthew Franklin's front-page report (Training fails to prepare new doctors, 1 February) highlights the importance of high-quality training for newly graduated medical students, but does not fully acknowledge the impact of increasing student numbers without a corresponding increase in training facilities.

Australia is currently seeing its biggest ever growth in new doctors. In 2006, there were 1,335 medical graduates (not including international students), and this number is set to more than double to 3,108 by 2014.

If you double the size of any industry over a few years it will create headaches, and one of the most pressing is ensuring quality, and sufficient of training places.

We need to look at not only additional training places in the traditional teaching hospitals, but look at training in new settings, including private hospitals, and expanding the training that young doctors can do in general practice.

This needs to be urgently addressed at state and federal level if we are to maintain our world-class medical standards.

Australia now has 18 universities that teach medical students and, each year, a new cohort of graduates enters the workforce as interns. This is where they spend their first year as doctors, under close supervision from experienced clinicians, consolidating their skills in the practical aspects of medicine.

This intern year is crucial to a doctor's development. It is when years of study is translated into the practical application of medicine, from treating wounds and reading x-rays to dealing with patients and preparing medication doses.

Today, most medical schools have pre-internship programs that help bridge the gap from medical school to internship. But ensuring there are adequate places are vital as it can take 14 years to train a qualified, independent doctor, including medical school, internship, residency and specialist training.

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1 February, 2010