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Deans contribute to health workforce reform

Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand is actively working to be part of the health workforce solution in parallel with ongoing national health reform.

Challenges facing student interns, the clinical academic workforce and the future demand for doctors will be on the agenda at the 2011 Medical Deans Annual Conference.

Also up for discussion will be how to best assess Australia's medical graduates, and how to strengthen partnerships between Aboriginal medical services and universities, particularly through placing students into Indigenous health settings.

'It is a dynamic time for universities and medical graduates alike,' said Professor Justin Beilby, the President of Medical Deans. 'A record number of medical graduates is coming through the university system, and the number of intern places has not kept pace, so there are now pressing issues about where they spend their first year post-university.'

Professor Beilby said another key issue for universities in Australia and New Zealand was clinical academic staff, who have been the cornerstone of medical student education for decades. 'These practitioners are crucial to overall medical education and research at universities, yet we are finding it harder to recruit and retain these staff.'

Professor Beilby said training for students in Indigenous health was currently limited, and something Medical Deans was keen to expand. 'Medical Deans wants to build on our links with our Indigenous partners to allow more student exposure to primary health care settings, as well as adding 'value' to service provision in these settings,' Professor Beilby said. An important part of the conference is the biannual Indigenous Knowledge Initiative conducted in partnership with the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, which will engage all Deans in better understanding the health issues of Indigenous Australians in Greater Western Sydney, an area with the highest urban population of Indigenous Australians in Australia.

The conference is being hosted by the University of Western Sydney on 6-8 September 2011. It will include speakers from Health Workforce Australia, the Australian Government, New Zealand Government, Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Australian Medical Council, Australian Learning and Teaching Council, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Medical Students Association and Medical Board of Australia.