

Media release

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Increasing our understanding of medical students' contribution to hospital services

The findings from research by the University of Melbourne is adding to our understanding of the contribution made by medical students to the health services where they undertake their clinical placements.

“Most people who have been to a hospital will have experienced medical students being part of the team that looks after them. It’s long been recognised that working directly with patients is a vital aspect to a medical student’s learning experience, however what’s been less understood are the ways in which these placements benefit the health service, patients and the broader community” says the President of Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, Professor Richard Murray.

The research, commissioned by Medical Deans, looked at students in their second, third and fourth year of their medical program working at Western Health, a large outer metropolitan health service in Melbourne.

Not surprisingly, the findings of the study confirmed that students often help with the heavy clinical workloads in hospitals as they absorb some of the simpler tasks involved in patient care thus freeing up experienced clinicians to do the more complex and high risk clinical work.

One of the most significant findings is evidence that medical students enhance the quality of care provided by individual clinicians and that this impact carries through to the broader clinical team and health service as a whole. This backs up a previous study showing major teaching hospitals have lower mortality rates for common conditions than non-teaching hospitals.

The research reveals that teaching and supervising clinicians reported they were more likely to keep up to date with new clinical developments because of their students’ questions and keenness to learn. They also reported they were more conscious of how they did things and more likely to reflect on their own practice. One supervisor stated that *“the internal cogs are working a bit harder... makes my clinical performance better”*.

“Of particular interest was the feedback from patient representatives and the community” said Professor Murray. “Participants reported that patients responded very positively to medical students being involved in their care. They liked being able to contribute to developing the future generation of doctors and were proud about having a teaching hospital in their community. They felt less intimidated talking with students and would tell them things that they hadn’t told the specialist. This is invaluable in patients getting the care they need.”

Work-integrated learning is a vital aspect of medical schools producing graduates ready to take up their internships at the end of their medical degree. This study provides valuable insights from those involved – the students, their supervisors, patient representatives, and health service managers –

and adds to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the wide ranging benefits provided by clinical placements.

The final report can be accessed [here](#)

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Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand Inc. (Medical Deans) is the peak body representing professional entry-level medical education, training and research in Australia and New Zealand. The organisation's membership comprises the Deans of Australia's 21 medical schools and the two New Zealand schools. As well as having an extensive representative and advocacy role in the advancement of health and education, Medical Deans auspice and manage a number of significant projects in relation to the medical workforce, including the Medical Schools Outcomes Database, Indigenous health through the LIME Network, graduate competencies and benchmarking, clinical supervision, students health and well-being, and social accountability.