

**NEWS RELEASE BY
THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL
AND
THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, FLINDERS UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

FIRST FOUR-YEAR MEDICAL PROGRAM IS ACCREDITED

Australia's national accreditation and standards body for basic medical education, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), has accredited the new four-year graduate entry medical program at the School of Medicine Flinders University of South Australia. The course, which commences next year, has conditional accreditation subject to an assessment of years 3 and 4 before their introduction and pending a full assessment after at least one cohort of graduates has been produced.

The decision follows the recommendations of a seven-member assessment team which spent a week at the School in March 1995, considering the School's plans and talking to the curriculum planners, teaching staff, and students of the present six-year course about the changes.

In announcing the decision, AMC President Professor Joe Correy said: "The report on the course is a favourable one. In the case of a new development such as this, the AMC may either grant conditional accreditation to the course or decide that accreditation should not be granted. While it has granted conditional accreditation to the new program, the structure of years 3 and 4 is still unfolding and the AMC wishes to assess the final plans for these years before they commence."

A detailed report on the assessment of the program has been presented to the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Ian Chubb, and the Dean of the School of Medicine, Professor Nick Saunders.

In its report, the assessment team has commended the School's clear plans for the development of each stage of the course, and the retention of many of the strengths of the existing course such as early patient contact, opportunities for elective study, and the teaching of the structure and function of the human body in integrated systems units. New developments which are praised include the introduction of new education methods including problem-based learning, the organisation of course material under four curriculum themes (The Doctor and the Patient, The Doctor and Knowledge of Health and Illness, The Doctor, Community and Society, and The Doctor and Personal/Professional Development), and the inclusion in the course of perspectives in law, ethics, economics and quality; population and public health; and psychobehavioural issues.

A feature of the new program is that, to obtain entry, applicants will need to hold a 3-year degree in any area of study. In addition, they will be required to sit the Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admission Test (GAMSAT), which covers problem-solving, writing and verbal reasoning, and knowledge of the physical and biological sciences, and to undertake a structured interview. The AMC report comments that the selection process should ensure that students have an adequate academic background to cope with the course. However, a follow-up evaluation will be needed to assess whether the School achieves its aims of greater equity of access and selection of students with the personal characteristics associated with success in medical school and later practice.

In response to the report, Professor Saunders said: "We welcome the very favourable report of the AMC which culminated more than four years of planning and detailed curriculum design. The new course continues the strong tradition of curriculum innovation which has characterised the Flinders School. It builds on such strengths as early contact with patients, an interdisciplinary integrated approach and the opportunity to be involved in a wide range of research programs. The course will incorporate an increased emphasis on the social and community aspects of medicine, using a problem-based, small group approach to learning."

"Detailed planning of years 3 and 4 is now well advanced and it is intended that students will gain considerable experience in remote and rural areas of South Australia and the Northern Territory in these years, including the newly announced clinical school to be based at Royal Darwin hospital. A cohesive strand dealing with rural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is planned for inclusion in all four years of the program."

"Students commence the new course on 5 February 1996, and student interviews have just been completed. Applicants have been of a very high standard and the first cohort of 61 students will be outstanding."

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