

7 April 2020

No students, no future

Supporting our future doctors is important now and in years to come

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on health services is unprecedented in living memory. Clinicians and health services have shown incredible commitment to ensuring we can provide care to all those who need it now and in the months ahead, and we must do everything possible to support them.

It is already recognised that medical students will be an important part of planned ‘surge’ responses within the health services, both in this initial phase of preparation and crisis response and in sustaining health care beyond the first wave of the pandemic. The roles they will play are becoming clearer and starting to be implemented through the collaborative work being done by medical schools, health services and jurisdictions. Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand has released a statement¹ and set of principles² to guide discussions and decisions about these roles.

During this time, it is vital that students’ progression through their medical training continues. Students in their clinical years constitute the immediate future health care workforce and reducing clinical placement experience to the extent that it affects progression and graduation will impact the supply of work-ready and pandemic-cognate graduates for 2021 onwards.

Immersive and experiential learning is crucial for medical students’ education and a necessary aspect of ensuring medical graduates are ready for their next step as junior doctors. Everything possible needs to be done to ensure clinical placements are maintained. Where student participation has been paused, to allow time for new forms of placements and workforce roles to be established, schools are ensuring students are well-prepared and well-supported.

Medical Deans, the Medical Board of Australia, and the Australian Medical Council are working closely to ensure that our future doctors retain the high level of training and experiential learning that the community needs. The AMC has provided additional guidance for medical schools on standards of medical education³. As with all other areas of clinical education, immersion in a real clinical context ensures deep and effective learning and remains a crucial aspect of our graduates being well-prepared for their internship. It is vital that this receives the support and commitment it needs from all involved.

Whilst recognising the current pressures on health services, we call on them – and on all health professionals and jurisdictions – to work with us to maintain or adapt clinical placements and support students’ access to the clinical training necessary to secure our future doctor workforce.



Professor Ian Symonds

President
Medical Deans
Australia and New Zealand



Professor Anne Tonkin

Chair
Medical Board of Australia



Professor David Ellwood

President
Australian Medical Council

¹ https://medicaldeans.org.au/md/2020/03/2020-March-19_medical-students-contribution-to-the-COVID-19-health-workf....pdf

² https://medicaldeans.org.au/md/2020/03/2020-March-20_principles-for-medical-student-roles-in-COVID-19-health-workforce.pdf

³ <https://www.amc.org.au/>