

**JOINT NEWS RELEASE BY
THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL
AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO**

AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL ACCREDITS OTAGO MEDICAL FACULTY

Australia's national accreditation and standards body for basic medical education, the Australian Medical Council (AMC) has released its first assessment report on a New Zealand medical school. The report details the findings of a seven-member assessment team which visited the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Otago for a week in August 1994.

Extension of the AMC accreditation process to the New Zealand medical schools has been the subject of discussion between the AMC and the Medical Council of New Zealand since 1991 when the Australian Health Ministers decided to restrict the unconditional registration of medical practitioners in Australia to graduates of Australian and New Zealand medical schools, and overseas trained doctors who hold the AMC examination certificate. "The AMC is using the same processes and criteria to assess the New Zealand schools as it has used to assess the Australian schools," said AMC President, Professor Joe Correy. "AMC accreditation of a New Zealand medical school will confirm the graduates' eligibility for registration as medical practitioners in any State or Territory of Australia. The Medical Council of New Zealand will still make its own decisions about registration of the graduates in New Zealand, but will take account of the AMC accreditation reports in making those decisions."

Professor Richard Larkins of the University of Melbourne, who is chair of the AMC Accreditation Committee and chaired the visiting assessment team, commented: "The Faculty has many of the indicators of a high quality medical school. It has committed and capable staff, and students of high calibre. It has been a significant contributor to medical research in the past and now has several outstanding research groups." Features of the Faculty's medical course which are particularly commended in the AMC report are the strong community orientation, the programs in public health, biomedical ethics and general practice, and recent initiatives in Maori health.

The AMC report has identified several areas of concern, and because of these concerns the AMC has accredited the Faculty for five years rather than the maximum possible period (10 years). Professor Larkins said: "The AMC assessment took place when the New Zealand health reforms were still evolving, and there was uncertainty about the potential outcomes for the Faculty and medical education. While the AMC has not commented on the merits of the health reforms, it has identified some critical issues for consideration." The restructuring of the health system has included the establishment of a formal purchaser/provider split and one of the conditions on the AMC accreditation is that the Faculty hold urgent discussions with the bodies which purchase health services (Regional Health Authorities) and the bodies which provide health services (Crown Health Enterprises) to resolve the uncertainties and problems identified in the AMC report.

The other condition that the AMC has placed on the accreditation is that the students' practical experience in obstetrics must improve, with each student having the opportunity to perform normal deliveries. Professor Larkins commented: "This would mean that, as graduates, they could assist normal birth in urgent situations, and would understand the process and be able to communicate effectively with pregnant women." The AMC has also recommended that reviews of the Faculty's management and administrative structures, and the staff support and development programs be conducted.

Professor Larkins said: "The AMC would encourage decisive action on the part of the Faculty, the University, health authorities and government to deal with the issues raised in the AMC report. When these issues are addressed, the Faculty can invite the AMC to conduct a review to determine whether its accreditation should be extended to ten years."

The Vice-Chancellor of the University, Dr Graeme Fogelberg, and the Dean of Faculty, Professor David Stewart, have received the AMC's detailed report on the assessment visit. In response, Professor Stewart said that the assessment process had been a constructive one for the Faculty and that a number of actions had already been taken to address the issues that were identified. Relationships with the Crown Health Enterprises have developed considerably and agreements have been completed in a number of key areas. Professor Stewart is confident that there will be no interruption of the teaching programs as a result of the health sector restructuring.

Obstetrics experience in the Faculty has also been reviewed and a statement of minimum practical experience to be achieved by all students before graduation has been adopted. This will ensure that graduates will have had sufficient experience to play their part in shared care of an expecting mother, to recognise abnormality and to be able to take appropriate action in the face of common obstetric abnormalities.

Organisational and administrative issues will be addressed by a working party on the Faculty structure which has been established by the Vice-Chancellor and has held its first meeting.

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