

**NEWS RELEASE BY
THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL
AND
THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

GRADUATE MEDICAL PROGRAM IS ACCREDITED

The new four-year medical course at the University of Sydney, which admitted its first 130 students in 1997, has won endorsement from the Australian Medical Council (AMC). The AMC, which is responsible for the accreditation of medical schools in Australia and New Zealand, has granted the University of Sydney's new Graduate Medical Program full accreditation, and will review the program again when the first two years of graduates are in practice. Accreditation by the AMC means that the graduates of the new program are eligible for provisional registration as medical practitioners in any State or Territory of Australia.

The Council's decision follows two detailed reviews of the plans for the new program by small expert teams: one in 1996 before the course commenced and a second, in March 1998, to assess the plans for the third and fourth years of the course.

Professor Robert Porter, now at James Cook University, who chaired both assessments of the course, said: 'Both assessments of the University of Sydney's Graduate Medical Program found well-developed and innovative curriculum plans that build on the Faculty of Medicine's strengths and that are being implemented by enthusiastic and dedicated staff. The AMC team that visited the Faculty of Medicine in March 1998 found that the graduate program had been successfully established and that students are clearly enjoying their learning experiences. The AMC team had no doubts about the capacity and the capability of the Faculty of Medicine to achieve its objectives because all the processes are in place for the timely completion of the work still to be done.'

The new program uses small-group, problem-based and student-directed learning as the major learning approach. From the beginning of the program, learning is based on clinical problems presented in tutorial settings, and each problem includes one or more issues of ethical, social, interpersonal or behavioural significance, encouraging students to see clinical issues in a broad setting and to use evidence-based approaches to clinical tasks. The students' experiences in clinical and community settings begin from the first week of the program.

The AMC has presented a detailed report on the assessment of the Graduate Medical Program to the University of Sydney. The report highlights a number of strengths of the Faculty, including the quality of the teaching staff, and the excellent facilities and resources to support teaching. Particularly commended are the Faculty's decision to use information technology to support learning in ways that reflect the students' likely use of these technologies in medical practice and the impressive array of learning resources available to students on the Faculty's intranet.

Both AMC assessments of the Graduate Medical Program commended the strong support the Faculty receives from the NSW Health Department. The Faculty uses teaching hospitals and community centres in central, western and northern Sydney Area Health Services and in the ACT in all four years of the program. Students in the new program undertake a minimum of eight weeks' experience in rural locations, and the Faculty has developed links to over 200 general practitioners in rural areas, and 20 hospitals in rural New South Wales and four in the Northern Territory. The AMC Report comments on the quantity and the quality of the resources available within the health

system as a whole to sustain the Graduate Medical Program, and the enthusiastic response of staff in the teaching health services to the new program.

As well as identifying the strengths of the graduate program, the AMC Report also identifies areas where further work is required. Professor Porter said: 'The Faculty has clear plans for the last two years of the Graduate Medical Program but some decisions on content and structure are still being finalised. As is its usual practice, the AMC has asked the Faculty to report annually on the final development of curriculum components and its experience in implementing them.'

In response to the report, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Professor Stephen Leeder said: 'The Faculty of Medicine, its students, its 1500 members of staff many of whom give their time voluntarily to teaching, its large and small affiliated hospitals and general practitioners, should all be delighted by this endorsement.'

'With this new program we have opened our doors to men and women who have had an opportunity through previous university study and work now to be quite clear about their commitment to a medical career,' Professor Leeder said. 'Their diversity of background, their motivation and enthusiasm have been an immense stimulus to the Faculty. The new curriculum brings the many disciplines that serve medicine together in new ways has been a great stimulus to the Faculty also,' he said. 'It makes excellent use of modern IT and contemporary educational best practice.'

'The accreditation is a special tribute to the work of several academics, including Ann Sefton, Michael Field and Jill Gordon as the planners, and a team of support staff including Simon Carlile who led the computer-based developments. The former Dean John Young played a major role in winning support for the new program. Literally hundreds of staff have been involved in this development over the past five years.'

'We are still working to develop fully the program for the third and fourth years of the new course, as well as maintaining our responsibilities to the students who remain in our previous course. That, too, won the endorsement of the AMC several years ago. We look to maintain our high quality medical education,' Professor Leeder said.

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