

**NEWS RELEASE BY
THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL
AND
THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, THE FLINDERS UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
FLINDERS GRADUATE MEDICAL PROGRAM IS ACCREDITED AND HIGHLY
COMMENDED**

Australia's national accreditation and standards body for basic medical education, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), has granted accreditation to the new four-year Graduate Entry Medical Program offered by The Flinders University of South Australia until the Year 2001. This follows two assessments of the program by the AMC: one in 1995 before the first intake of students to the course, and another in April 1997 which looked at the plans for the third and fourth years of the course.

In announcing the accreditation decision, AMC President Professor John Horvath said: "The first assessment of the Graduate Entry Medical Program resulted in a favourable report. The AMC had decided that it would conduct a second assessment when the detailed plans for years 3 and 4 were available, and the report from that assessment is also very favourable. The AMC congratulates the Flinders Medical School on this exciting and well-planned program."

Professor Greg Whelan of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Studies at the University of Melbourne, who chaired both assessments of the course, said: "In its plans for the Graduate Entry Medical Program, the Flinders Medical School is building on the strengths of the existing undergraduate medical course, and on its experience in curriculum innovation and design. The students in the first two years of the program are obviously enjoying the course. The School has much to be proud of in the new program."

The report on the 1997 assessment highlights a number of innovations planned for years 3 and 4 of the course, particularly the diversity of settings for delivery of the curriculum. Students will be able to undertake student internships in a wide range of specialties and sub-specialties, and of locations. The course also will include continuity of care experiences in which students follow a panel of three patients for at least six months; a focus on rural health which will give all students a minimum of eight weeks exposure to rural medicine; increased experience in general practice; and a transition to internship program to assist the students' passage to the junior doctor career stages.

In 1996, Flinders University of South Australia and the Northern Territory Government signed an agreement to establish a Clinical School at the Royal Darwin Hospital to provide medical education and medical research in the Northern Territory. Under the agreement, there will be a quota of up to 10 places for Northern Territory residents in the annual intake of the

Graduate Entry Medical Program. Students in the quota will spend the final two years of the course in the Northern Territory. They will be based primarily at the Royal Darwin Hospital in year 3, and at Darwin, Alice Springs and community hospitals and health services in year 4. Adelaide based students will also have opportunities to gain clinical experience in the Northern Territory. The AMC report comments on the strong commitment of Northern Territory based staff and institutions to the development, and the strategies implemented to ensure that the course available in the Northern Territory will be comparable academically to that available to Adelaide-based students. The opportunities that will be available to students in rural and remote health, and Aboriginal and tropical health care are commended.

Also commended is the School's Parallel Rural Community Curriculum, which allows 8 volunteer students to spend their third year based in community hospitals, health services and private general practices in towns in the Riverland, a rural community about 250 kilometres from Adelaide. The AMC report comments that this program provides "*a clinical setting that is unique for Australian medical education and which has few comparable programs elsewhere in the world.*"

A detailed report on the assessment of the program has been presented to the University, and the Medical School will be asked to report annually to the AMC on its experience in implementing the new course. In response to the report, the Dean of the School of Medicine, Professor Nick Saunders said:

"We are delighted by the highly favourable report provided by the AMC. The first two intakes of students into our new medical course are outstanding, and students and staff are greatly enjoying the focus on problem based learning and clinical experience in hospital and community settings. Flinders has made a major commitment to providing all students with broad opportunities to experience the practice of medicine in rural and remote Australia. It is especially pleasing to see these efforts so warmly commended by the AMC. Their report concludes that "*The (accreditation) team believes that this course, its innovations and its design are novel and imaginative and may well act as a blueprint for the future delivery of medical education for years to come. As such, this is an important time for Flinders, for the Territory and for medical education in Australasia.*" The staff and students at Flinders accept this challenge with great optimism, based on the School's tradition of excellence and innovation in education."

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18 July 1997