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### **New medical course in Western Australia**

The University of Western Australia will introduce a new medical course commencing in the Year 2000, with accreditation from the national standards body for basic medical education, the Australian Medical Council (AMC). Accreditation means that graduates of the new course can be registered as medical practitioners in any Australian State or Territory.

The new curriculum emphasises student participation in the education process through self-directed and problem-based learning, allows students to study optional areas in depth, and exposes students to a wide range of hospital and community experiences, including experiences in rural communities. Unlike traditional medical courses, the new course introduces students to clinical medicine from Year 1.

Students will be selected for the new WA medical course on a combination of their academic results, their results in the Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admission Test which assesses logical reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking, and a structured interview.

Dr Kerry Breen, AMC President said: "Over the last decade, all the Australian medical schools have reviewed how they select and teach medical students to ensure they are producing doctors who have the knowledge, skills and attitudes for modern medical practice. The practice of medicine keeps evolving and methods of medical education must also. The challenge for all medical schools is to teach factual knowledge and practical skills, and to encourage students to be enquiring, analytical and to develop desirable professional attitudes."

The AMC's decision to accredit the course is based on the report of an expert team that visited the Faculty for a week in July 1999. The Chair of the team, Professor Laurie Geffen from the University of Queensland, said: "The Faculty's plans are in keeping with the direction in which most modern medical curricula have developed. The significant clinical opportunities in the early part of the course, the expanded options for students to study in rural areas, and the opportunities for students to engage in the Faculty's excellent medical and health research are all commendable features."

In a detailed report on the new course, the AMC has highlighted several issues for further attention. In particular, the AMC has highlighted the need for strong and supportive relationships between the Faculty and the Western Australian health services.

Professor Geffen said: "The success of any medical course depends on the support of the health services, and hospital and community based clinicians, including general practitioners. Equally, health care institutions benefit from being centres for medical education, since high standards of clinical service and quality of patient care are ensured by the involvement of the clinicians in teaching and research. The Faculty needs to ensure that organisations and individuals within the health services are well informed about the new curriculum and the changes it will entail in teaching practices and in resources."

Responding to the decision, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, Professor Lou Landau said: "The Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry is delighted with this outcome. Accreditation for 7 years, contingent upon a review in late 2000 is an excellent result and comes after tireless effort from the Faculty to develop an innovative medical curriculum that is in line with modern education best practice in this field. The key features include both vertical and horizontal integration of course content, exposure to

clinical environments and problems throughout the course - beginning in first year, and an emphasis on problem-based and self-directed learning.

We are confident that this new curriculum places the Faculty in an ideal position to effectively respond to the continuous change and increasing demands of the teaching and learning environment.”

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