

Area of Need forum

Forum notes

On 23 June 2008 the Department of Human Services held a forum to discuss the development and application of the Area of Need policy in Victoria. The forum was facilitated by Dr Heather Wellington and participants included representatives from metropolitan and rural health services, the specialist colleges, recruitment agencies, the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria, the Rural Workforce Agency of Victoria, the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Medical Council.

The purpose of this paper is to summarize a number of the discussion points raised by participants during the forum, and where applicable, to outline strategies for consideration and implementation.

Key Discussion Points

District of Workforce Shortage

- There is significant concern about the methodology used by the Commonwealth to determine district of workforce shortage.
- The methodology is not clear and results in significant anomalies (one practice being eligible – another nearby practice not being eligible).
- Lack of clarity between jurisdictional functions and responsibility for District Workforce Shortage and Area of Need.

Action

- *The department will facilitate discussions with the Department of Health and Ageing on this issue and provide feedback to stakeholders.*

Area of Need endorsement process

- There is a need to formalise Area of Need endorsements in order to meet Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria requirements.
- Victoria's policy of endorsing all applications for Area of Need under 7 (1) c of the Health Professions Registration Act 2005 where written advice on Area of Need determinations no longer apply, to be formalised by the department with the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria.

Action

- *The department will forward a letter to the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria to document and formalise the process.*

National Assessment of International Medical Graduates

- Concerns were raised about the national assessment process for International Medical Graduates that is being phased in from July 2008. Some of the issues included the potential delays in recruitment for unplanned vacancies with health services no longer able to recruit International Medical Graduates to fill an urgent work need and then provide training and supervision for them.

Action

- *This issue was deemed outside the scope of the Area of Need Forum. The department however has been working with the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria on transitional implementation arrangements to address the concerns expressed by health services. As part of these arrangements, the Service and Workforce Planning Branch has offered to assist health services to address any problems that arise during implementation of the new process.*
- *In 2008–09 the department will convene an International Medical Graduate Workforce Reference Group to provide independent advice to the department, the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria and others on implementation of the national International Medical Graduate assessment process. The reference group will oversee efforts to inform and engage stakeholders in matters relating to International Medical Graduate recruitment, assessment, orientation, upskilling and support.*

Australian trained doctors superseded by International Medical Graduates

- Concerns were raised that the Victorian policy of endorsing all Area of Need applications might result in an International Medical Graduate being employed in preference to an Australian trained doctor. Raised in this context, was also the issue of remuneration of Australian trained doctors and International Medical Graduates.

Action

- *Forum participants recognised the risk for unscrupulous behaviour not consistent with the intent of the policy but indicated that the Victorian Area of Need process worked well and should not be changed as a result of exceptional circumstances where an International Medical Graduate is employed in preference to an Australian trained doctor. In such cases there are avenues of appeal such as through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.*

Supervision of International Medical Graduates

- The issues of clinical governance, quality and supervision of International Medical Graduates employed in Area of Need locations needs to be further considered. Forum participants expressed concern about the level of support, education and supervision provided to International Medical Graduates particularly in remote locations where International Medical Graduates are often working in isolation.

Action

- *Whilst outside the scope of the Area of Need Forum, the department is willing to facilitate discussions with interested stakeholders on this issue.*
- *In 2008, in order to enhance the effectiveness of supervision, the department will provide funding for supervision and performance management courses, as well as resources for supervisors and managers of International Medical Graduates.*
- *The department will also investigate the establishment of an International Medical Graduate regional support model to provide ongoing support and development opportunities for supervisors and educators of International Medical Graduates, particularly those in smaller health services*

Recommendation

There was consensus from forum participants that the department should continue with its current policy of endorsing all Area of Need applications. Forum participants agreed that health services were best placed to determine ‘need’ and indicated that the Victorian Area of Need process was pragmatic, expedient and did not place barriers to the recruitment of medical practitioners in Victoria.

Groups represented at the forum included:

Austin Health
Australian & New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
Australian Association of Medical Recruitment Agents
Australian College of Emergency Medicine
Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
Australian Medical Association
Australian Medical Council
Barwon Health
Central Gippsland Health Service
Cleveland McBride Health Recruitment
General Practice Networks
Goulburn Valley Health
Latrobe Regional Hospital
Medical Oncall
Medical Practitioners Board (Victoria)
Melbourne Health
Mildura Base Hospital
Northern Health
Peninsula Health
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
Rural Workforce Agency of Victoria
Southern Health
Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority
Wavelength
Werribee Mercy Hospital
Western Health
Wimmera Health Care Group

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