

Health-care system leaves patients, medicos in the waiting room

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The Australian accreditation and registration system for international medical graduates is critically ill and the country needs to create a better system to support overseas health professionals or it will continue to face doctor shortages, according to an academic from The Australian National University.

Dr Sue Douglas, ANU Senior Lecturer with the Academic Unit of General Practice and Community Health warns that the current system for the registration and accreditation of international medical graduates (IMGs) needs significant reforms. While the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreement to establish a national registration and accreditation scheme could improve the situation for IMGs, she says many questions about the new system still need answering.

Her paper, *The Registration and Accreditation of International Medical Graduates in Australia – A Broken System or a Work in Progress?*, is published in this month's issue of *People and Place*.

In the paper she details her own experience of negotiating the complexities of the Australian system as an overseas trained doctor from Canada, highlights flaws in the current system and how the proposed reforms put forward by COAG could address many of these problems. She says that since it is necessary for Australia to call on the services of IMGs, a proper system must be in place to support them.

"Countries like Australia have always relied on IMGs to provide medical

services, particularly to rural and remote regions. Once a country has established the need to recruit an IMG because they are unable to secure the services of a domestic graduate, it has an ethical responsibility to ensure that they encounter a fair system," she said.

"Arguably, Australia also has a moral obligation to utilise the expertise of its own IMG citizens and permanent residents first, rather than draw on the precious medical manpower resources of other countries – particularly those from the developing world."

She added that although the COAG agreement aims to improve the process for IMG accreditation and registration, significant questions still remained including the role that existing accreditation bodies would play in the new system, the future of reforms in progress, the danger of increased bureaucratic red tape and the threat of government interference in the decision making process.

"The proposed national registration system is an exciting opportunity to explore these options and build a better system for Australia in the future. But the success of these reforms will largely depend on the ability of the individual stakeholders to put aside their differences and self interests to work together towards a common goal – the establishment of a healthcare system that supports and respects all healthcare workers, Australian and internationally trained alike."

Source: Research Australia

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