

New Medical School Places

The government has recently allowed a number of new medical school places – initially (some months ago) full fee paying domestic students and more recently 400 Commonwealth Supported Places. In addition James Cook and ANU Medical Schools are soon to graduate their first cohorts.

What will these changes mean for the GP workforce? At first glance, it would appear that more students should translate into more doctors for general practice. Unfortunately, I believe it is not that simple.

A report from AMWAC in 2005 found a reduction between 2002 and 2004 in the average hours worked for doctors of many demographics – male and female,

single and married. This means that an already precarious workforce in terms of numbers is becoming more precarious by dint of reducing its hours. Add to this the aging of the GP population and this trend can only be set to worsen.

Then think about these new students. The full fee paying domestic students will graduate with debts of up to \$200,000. The AMWAC report warns that there is evidence that debt of this type influences choice of career, and you can be sure that the influence will not be in the direction of general practice.

If you think I seem overly pessimistic, review an article by Joyce et al in the May edition of the MJA, reporting some results from her NHMRC Primary Health Care postgraduate research scholarship. This predicts that while the specialty workforce will rise until 2012, the GP workforce will stay fairly static, if not decline. This article was written before the new student places were announced – but those students will not be entering clinical practice before 2012.

As an organization, I think we may need to think about strategies for

addressing these difficulties. While primary health care teams might seem to provide an answer, it would be interesting for some of us to re-search whether this model relieves the need for GPs, or perhaps instead – like so many new models before it – meets unmet need without reducing the need for general practitioners. Are there other strategies that might help to make GP more attractive to graduates? It might be wise for us to raise our voices about future workforce planning, as well. Perhaps after 2012, at least, we can look to an upward trend in GP numbers again.

References:

Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee. AMWAC Report 2005.3. Career decision making by postgraduate doctors.

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Joyce CM, McNeil JJ, Stoelwinder JU. More doctors, but not enough: Australian medical workforce supply 2001-2012. MJA 2006; 184:441-446.

Professor Dimity Pond
Discipline of General Practice
University of Newcastle

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President's Message

We are about to meet together in Perth for the GP and PHC Research Conference and AAAGP is delighted to be an integral part of the success of the program. It was a difficult task for the committee to select the outstanding research to take centre stage during our distinguished paper session. All the reviewers were struck by the quality and breadth of the submitted abstracts. Research quality, significance and originality were in abundance. The future is bright for primary care research. As I step down from my two years as

President of the Association it is rewarding to see that AAAGP has grown to the largest ever membership and our voice is heard in many arenas, thanks to the tireless advocacy of our members. We have representatives working closely with the RACGP, the PHC RED program, GPET and numerous Divisions across the country. We have lobbied hard for continued support for general practice and primary care teaching and research. Our newsletter lives again and our email network ensures timely communication and we have, thus far,

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Message from President (continued)

of

avoided email overload. Our Association provides important awards for our developing discipline: Best First-time Presenter Award, Distinguished Paper Awards and the Travelling Fellowship Award. These awards consolidate what it means to be a general practice and primary care academic. We have also honoured a number of tireless AAAGP advocates with life membership.

Our members working in University Departments of General Practice and Rural Health have been preparing for the forthcoming research quality framework and have all faced budget constraints and very heavy teaching loads. Despite this I am optimistic about the future of academic primary care in Australia; with some provisos. We must maintain a key role in the undergraduate medical curriculum and we must be funded adequately to do so. We must maintain our flow

grant applications to NHMRC to continue our discipline specific grant review panel. We urgently require more primary care post-doctoral posts if we are to capitalise on the gains of the past decade and to build for the future.

On a personal note I offer my heartfelt thanks to Debbie Mutton for her exceptional secretariat work for AAAGP; especially during the recent months when she has had to face enormous personal strain as she watches over the recovery of wonderful son, Tim.

Special thanks to the executive (Professor Dimity Pond, Professor Mark Nelson and Dr Grant Blashki) and the State Representatives, all of whom have added the AAAGP tasks to their already hectic schedules.

I hope you enjoy the Newsletter.

PROFESSOR JANE GUNN

Members in Action

GPET, the commonwealth company that oversees GP training, has a board appointed by the Minister for Health and Ageing (who is also the sole shareholder of the company). Most board members are nominated by acronymic organisations such as the RACGP, ADGP, CDAMS and ACRRM. AAAGP was first asked by the Minister to nominate a board member in 2004.

Issues on GPET's agenda at the moment that are of most importance for AAAGP members are:

1. Marketing initiatives to attract pre-vocational doctors to general practice. There is some research data around showing that new graduates perceive general practice as a discipline with poor academic underpinnings, so one of the three major marketing themes

for 2006 is the vitality of academic general practice.

2. Annual medical education and training convention in Hobart in August. The quality of educational research work presented at this convention has been steadily increasing to the point where it is now a very effective venue to share your findings with those who implement GP training. Details at www.gpet.com.au

3. Academic GP registrar program & Registrar Research & Scholarship Fund. This program is being reshaped to allow both potential applicants and academic departments more flexibility. It remains a very important entry point for the next generation of academic GPs.

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the third AAAGP newsletter which presents stories that span the lifetime of academic general practice.

Associate Professor Dimity Pond reports on the new wave of medical students we can expect in response to projected workforce shortages and how this will impact on the general practice teaching we provide.

Associate Professor Steve Trumble, through his work with GPET reports on how academic general practice is critical in encouraging young doctors to pursue careers in general practice. Part of this is to celebrate general practice as Dr Leanne Rowe has done in her "Proud to be a GP" publication which profiles our active colleagues. Meanwhile important primary care research continues around the country and we profile Dr Cate Howell from Adelaide and also the General Practice Unit in Fairfield in New South Wales.

Finally, we honour our experienced colleagues with the Lifetime Membership Awards, a group of inspiring leaders who have beaten a track for new teachers and researchers who choose to pursue academic careers in general practice, so that it is no longer an off-road experience!

We welcome your contributions for future editions of the newsletter, especially if you're new to working in the field of academic general practice.

Sincerely, Dr Grant Blashki

Department of General Practice

University of Melbourne

4. Research into aspects of vocational training. On-going workforce shortages despite the government's considerable investment in vocational training mean that there is growing interest in better understanding the reasons behind part time work choices, location of practice, breadth of skills utilized, feasibility of alternative models of training etc. AAAGP members can contact me via s.trumble@unimelb.edu.au

Introducing.....Dr Cate Howell

I am about to take up a new position this month as Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of General Practice at the University of Adelaide. In writing this piece I am aware that the steps towards an academic position began as soon as I began in general practice.

I have worked at a practice associated with the University of Adelaide for many years, and have gradually become involved in teaching. A passion for mental health led to post-graduate training in the area and ultimately research in the area. In recent years I have been very fortunate to have excellent mentors as well as the support of the Discipline and PHCRED enabling me to work as a Research Fellow and then Lecturer at the University.

Ideas for a PhD study originated during a year 2000 Churchill Fellowship to the United Kingdom on the primary care management of depression. International experts acknowledged the high relapse rate of depression and the lack of knowledge about preventing the return of symptoms.

These ideas developed into a framework for a primary health care depression relapse prevention program called 'Keeping the blues away'. In 2001 I began a study aiming to implement a primary care depression relapse prevention program and evaluate its effectiveness via a cluster randomisation trial.

The 'Keeping the blues away' program is based on a bio-psycho-social approach and involves 10 steps. It is unique because of its integrated approach to treatment, and because of the range of psychosocial strategies included for use in primary care. The program involves initial assessment & goal-setting with patients, support and encouragement, education about depression, general health promotion & lifestyle advice, development of coping skills including problem-solving & relaxation training, key cognitive strategies and a range of psychological interventions, encouragement of pleasurable/meaningful activities, fostering of supportive social relationships/social skills, and regular review of progress/skills by the gen-

eral practitioner.

The clinical trial has now been completed and the final data is being gathered and entered before analysis. I will be busy writing this year as part of my duties at the University of Adelaide. I am sure there will be many new challenges ahead!

Dr Cate Howell CSM
Senior Lecturer
Director Primary Care Mental Health Unit
Discipline of General Practice
University of Adelaide



Spotlight on UNSW

Research at the General Practice Unit, Fairfield Hospital, Sydney

The General Practice Unit at Fairfield is one of the research locations that make up the UNSW Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity (CPHCE). Other parts of CPHCE are the Centre for General Practice Integration Studies based on campus, Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation at Liverpool Hospital and Centre for Equity and Primary Health Research in Illawarra and Shoalhaven. Overall there are 27 full time equivalent research staff working across these four locations.

The focus on research activity at the General Practice Unit is health services research on management of chronic illness in primary care. There is also a focus on prevention through modification of behavioral risk factors such as tobacco smoking.

Examples of projects in chronic disease have been a series of studies on multidisciplinary care planning in-

cluding a NMHRC funded project on evaluating the outcomes of care planning for patients with type 2 diabetes. Another recently completed project has been collaboration with the University of Adelaide on evaluation of the GP asthma incentive.

There is an increasing portfolio of work in the area of prevention and management of chronic respiratory disease. Nick Zwar is leading a NHMRC project grant to test a nurse and GP partnership for care of COPD. Jeremy Bunker is developing a project on improved COPD diagnosis. Sarah Dennis is leading a project on better understanding of how the diagnosis of asthma is made in general practice. In the area of cardiovascular disease Sanjyot Vaghokar is working with PhD student Qing Wan, Mark Harris and Nick Zwar on a project to develop and test a shared approach to cardiovascular absolute risk assessment. In the area of risk factor modification, Nick Zwar is collaborating with Robyn Richmond on a demonstration project for a

primary care based smoking cessation service. This project follows on from work done on clinical practice guidelines for smoking cessation, disseminated nationally in June 2004. To keep us out of trouble we are also in the process of conducting an APH-CRI Stream Four funded systematic review of chronic disease management in primary care.

The General Practice Unit is also the location for some of the UNSW staff working on research capacity building. Our Senior Research Fellow, Dr Sarah Dennis and Suzan Mehmet are key staff in the UNSW Primary Health Care Research Network. This network has approximately 30 GP and 200 nursing, community and allied health and Divisions of General Practice staff. The network provides research training as well as mentoring for specific projects. An example of one current project is a randomized trial being done by Dr Paul Lam on Tai Chi for modifying cardiovascular risk in patients with type 2 diabetes.

PROUD TO BE A GP



**Dr Leanne Rowe Chair of
Victorian Faculty of RACGP**

At this time of rapid technological change, workforce shortage, increasing litigation, and the pressures of stifling red tape, it is imperative for GPs to look beyond their personal horizons and embrace a bigger story.

Seldom has there been a time when an inventory of the personal beliefs and sense of values underpinning our work has been more needed to sustain us. "Proud to be a GP", a supplement to the April 2006 edition of the RACGP's Australian Family Physician, is a compilation of GP stories reflecting on life lessons, overarching values, and key experiences. The common thread

between the stories is a sense of dedication, perseverance and humility.

The RACGP now invites other GPs to contribute stories for our next version of a larger book. We are not asking for a detailed CV, but insights about your extraordinary life in your everyday work as a GP. Please read the AFP April supplement and send your essay (suggested length 600 words) to be considered for publication to Dr. Leanne Rowe, Chair of the Victorian Faculty of the RACGP, at leanne.rowe@racgp.org.au.

Spotlight on UNSW (con't)



The people in the picture from left to right are: Dr Sarah Dennis (Senior Research Fellow) Dr Suzi Mikhail (Academic Registrar), me, Mr Iqbal Hasan (Project Officer), Ms Suzan Mehmet (Project Officer), Dr Jeremy Bunker (conjoint lecturer) and Dr Sanjot Vagholkar (conjoint lecturer)

Congratulations to:

Professor Jane Gunn who has been appointed the inaugural Professor/Chair of Primary Care Research and Director of the Primary Care Research Unit (PCRU) within the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.

PCRU draws together the research teams within the Department who represent a wide variety of clinical and research backgrounds and provides a vibrant research culture and infrastructure to support research of relevance to general practice and primary care.



Professor Jane Gunn

Mission & Goals

Formed in 1983, AAAGP aims to promote & develop the discipline of general practice through:

- Encouraging originality, questioning & exploration of ideas within teaching & research environment.
- Providing a forum for exchange of information & ideas.
- Encouraging shared academic activities.
- Fostering & supporting career development in academic general practice.
- Supporting the continuing development of academic general practice

Lifetime Memberships Awarded

During the RACGP Scientific Convention in Darwin Oct 2005, the following members were awarded AAAGP Lifetime Memberships Awards: Prof John Murtagh, Prof Neil Carson, Prof Max Kamien Prof Charles Bridges-Webb and Prof Peter Mudge.

Congratulations and thank you for your contribution to AAAGP.

GP & PHC Conference Perth 5-7 July 2006

First Time Presenters & Distinguished

Paper Awards

The Australian Association for Academic General Practice is pleased to announce that we will be sponsoring a prize for best paper delivered by a first-time presenter at the General Practice and Primary Health Care Research Conference, Perth 2006.

If you are presenting a paper for the **first time** at this conference you are eligible to be judged by the AAAGP research prize committee. The person judged as preparing and delivering the 'Best Paper Presentation' will receive a certificate and a Book Voucher valued at \$250. The award will be announced at closure of the conference. Visit our website and download an application form www.aaagp.org.

Judges are needed for this award so if you will be attending the conference please email Debbie to volunteer.

Our committee will also select two Distinguished Papers this year from abstracts submitted. These papers will be presented during the AAAGP session and the authors will be presented with a certificate.

AGM

Our **AGM** will be held at this conference on Thurs 6 July at 4.30pm. All members are encouraged to attend.

BOOTH

Once again we will be having our own booth and Debbie will be there to collect overdue subscriptions or new member applications. Credit card facilities will be available.

Annual Dinner

Our annual conference dinner will be held at the Old Swan Brewery on Wed 5 July at 7pm at a cost of \$60 members and \$75.

The Old Swan Brewery has been magnificently redeveloped and is nestled below Mt Eliza on the banks of the Swan River. It has spectacular views of the city skyline and major waterways. They have an award winning menu featuring the freshest, quality local produce. Original recipe beers are brewed onsite and there is also a self-tour of the history of the brewery.

We will be traveling a short distance to our dinner venue via shuttle bus. You are welcome to walk if you are feeling up to it!

Our guest speaker for the dinner will be Prof Martin Roland Director of the National Primary Care Research and Development Centre, University of Manchester. He will present (in a light hearted fashion) some of his experiences with the UK version of the "Research Quality Framework".

Travelling Fellowship

Applications are now open for our Travelling Fellowship.

Travelling Fellowships are offered at a maximum of \$5000 for a study trip of not less than 2 weeks duration. The funds are available to cover costs of travel to and from the host institution and to contribute towards accommodation costs. Airfares will be reimbursed for the cost of an advance purchase economy airfare. Applicants should book the cheapest available online fare wherever possible.

Closing date 30 August 2006.

For more details visit our website: www.aaagp.org

Aims of the AAAGP Travelling Fellowship Program

- To enhance Australian academic general practice
- To foster collaboration between Australian general practice researchers
- To foster collaboration between academic departments of general practice
- To provide assistance to members of AAAGP to undertake study leave within Australia

The AAAGP newsletter is to be published 3 times each year and welcomes letters to the editor and also articles about issues of general interest to the membership.

Editor gblashki@unimelb.edu.au

For membership information contact:

debbie.mutton@newcastle.edu.au

Or visit our website: www.aaagp.org

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Prof Dr Mr Mrs Ms
(Please print full name)

Organisation.....

Position.....

Mailing Address.....

Suburb..... State..... Post Code.....

Email Address.....

I wish to become a member of Australian Association for Academic General Practice. In the event of my admission as a member, I agreed to be bound by the rules of the Association for the time being in force.

I agree to my details being published in our membership list.

(Please sign)..... Date.....

I,
(Please print name)
is personally known to me, for membership of the Association.

(Signature of Proposer)..... Date.....

I,
(Please print name)
the applicant, who is personally known to me, for membership of the Association.

(Signature of Proposer)..... Date.....

Your payment method:

Cheque or Money order attached (make cheques payable to AAAGP and **post to:**
The Secretariat, Discipline of General Practice, Newcastle University University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308

Please charge my credit card account for the amount of **\$75.00 \$25** (Registrar or RHD student)
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