

## MEDIA RELEASE

### AMSA: Physician Assistants Not the Answer for Rural Health

The introduction of Physician Assistants (PAs) into Queensland hospitals will compromise the quality of medical student training for very little gain, the Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) said today.

The Queensland government recently announced their intention to roll out a Physician Assistant Pilot Program at five sites across the state. A similar pilot program is being planned for South Australia. These programs must be properly evaluated to assess their impact on health outcomes.

AMSA President Michael Bonning warned that substituting medical practitioners with PAs for workforce reasons or cost savings could not be supported because the latter will compete for finite clinical training resources currently utilised by medical students.

"The number of medical graduates in Australia is projected to increase from 1,200 in 2002 to 3,000 by 2012," Mr Bonning said.

"Already we are feeling the pinch of increased medical student numbers, with students being forced to deal with reduced hours of teaching, fewer resources and difficulties accessing infrastructure. The introduction of a new model of practitioner into the fold will further limit the clinical training resources for medical students," he said.

"Trainee Physician Assistants will reduce the access of medical students and junior doctors to patients and clinicians, to the detriment of their medical education and therefore future patient care," he said.

Physician Assistants are frequently cited as the solution to Australia's rural medical workforce crisis. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is the case.

"Once these Physician Assistants are trained, there will be nothing to stop them taking up posts in metropolitan hospitals. There are absolutely no guarantees that Physician Assistants will practice in rural and remote areas," Mr Bonning said.

"Instead of spending millions of dollars on creating a new model of healthcare practitioner for which there is no evidence of cost-effectiveness, we must focus on improving and expanding programs that promote rural retention," he said.

"There is evidence that recruiting students of rural origin and fostering early positive experiences for medical, nursing and allied health students in rural areas is promoting recruitment of rural practitioners," Mr Bonning said.

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