

10 November 2005

Commissioner
Health Workforce Study
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616

HealthWorkforce@pc.gov.au

Dear Mr Woods and Mr Fitzgerald

Re: Australia's Health Workforce Position Paper

Thank you for providing the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (the College) with the opportunity to comment on this Position Paper.

The College finds it incomprehensible that no effort was made to correct the error printed in the earlier Issues Paper, whereby it was suggested that the pathology workforce was considered to be maldistributed rather than experiencing a shortage. Worse still, the Position Paper has gone on to reiterate the same error (Summary - page XXII).

This is a matter of the utmost concern to the College. It directly contradicts the 2003 Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee (AMWAC) report, which proposed that ***an extra 100 registrar positions per year*** would be required to address the pathologist workforce crisis. Furthermore, it undermines continuing efforts by the College and other pathology associations, as outlined in our previous submission, to address the local effects of what is an international manpower shortage. A copy of the AMWAC 'The Specialist Pathology Workforce in Australia - supply and requirements 2003-2013' Executive Summary recommendations is attached for reference, and once again the College urges the Productivity Commission to correct this error in the final report and in any other publications relating to the Health Workforce Review.

Overall the College found the Position Paper to be quite detailed, but was concerned that it did not address the major issue confronting Australia's workforce, the divided responsibility between federal and state and territory governments and the resultant inefficiencies.

A considerable proportion of the information presented has been well known in the health sector for several years. It should be noted that a number of the initiatives put forward, such as training in the private sector and workforce substitution, have been employed by pathologists for some time.

The College is concerned about whether some of the newer strategies proposed will actually work. For example, how can we assume that replacement of AMWAC with a secretariat reporting to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council will be any more effective in achieving recommendations to increase workforce places? AMWAC reports are currently endorsed by Health Ministers, and yet a lack of government commitment to funding training places is the fundamental reason we have not been able to meet AMWAC recommendations for pathology.

The Productivity Commission has a unique opportunity here to propose courageous solutions to health workforce problems nationally, such as structural changes to eliminate cost shifting, transparency about rationing of health services, and public education and incentives for healthy lifestyle choices that reduce service utilisation. It will be disappointing indeed if this opportunity is lost amongst the establishment of various new bodies to take over roles currently performed by others, and the introduction of changes that some sectors have already deployed.

The College looks forward to the final report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Debra Graves', written in a cursive style.

Dr Debra Graves
Chief Executive Officer

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