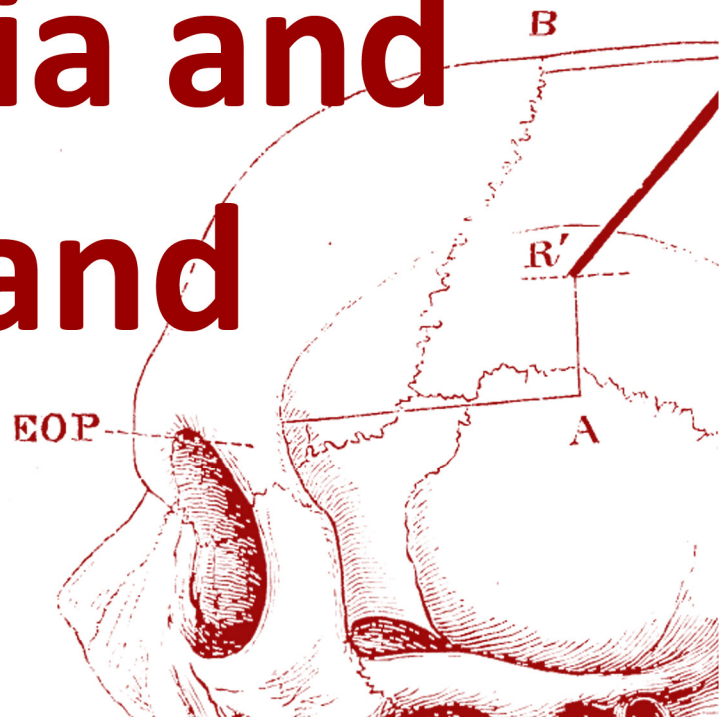




Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Medical education in Australia and New Zealand



Medical Education in Australia and New Zealand

Medical Education in Australia and New Zealand An Overview

Introduction

Medical education in Australia and New Zealand can be divided into four distinct stages, each of which involves the experience and expertise of different organisations. In some cases these organisations cover both Australia and New Zealand, while in other cases separate entities operate in each country.

The first stage of training is the responsibility of university medical schools. Entry to these may be directly from secondary school (direct entry) or by way of completing an earlier undergraduate degree (graduate entry).

The second, or pre-vocational, stage of training is jurisdictionally based and is overseen, in the case of the Australian States and Territories, by Postgraduate Medical Councils. In New Zealand it is the responsibility of the Education Committee of the Medical Council of New Zealand.

The third stage involves postgraduate vocational training and is the responsibility of the specialist medical colleges. These span State and Territory borders in Australia, and in some cases cover both Australia and New Zealand.

The fourth stage of medical training, and one that only ends with the retirement of the practitioner, is continuing professional development. Largely overseen by the specialist medical colleges, this requires practitioners to continually update their skills and ensure their knowledge is current. It also enables practitioners to widen or narrow their scope of practice.

The Role of the Medical Councils

In both Australia and New Zealand medical education and training is overseen by independent standards bodies.

The Australian Medical Council (AMC) assesses and, if appropriate, accredits the medical courses offered by Australian university medical schools. It also assesses and, where appropriate, accredits postgraduate medical specialist training programs and continuing professional development programs.

The AMC collaborates with the Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ) in the assessment and accreditation of specialist training programs and continuing professional development programs that involve medical practitioners or trainees from both countries.

Among their responsibilities, the AMC and MCNZ accredit the work of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in Australia and New Zealand.

The Path to Surgical Education and Training

Before applying to join the Surgical Education and Training (SET) Program at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, candidates must have completed a medical degree at an Australian or New Zealand university. Some universities offer direct entry from secondary school, while others require entrants to have earned a degree in another discipline.

University Medical Courses

Universities offering degrees in medicine with direct entry programs are:

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- Bond University (Queensland) www.bond.edu.au/about/faculties/hsm/index.html
- James Cook University (Queensland) www.jcu.edu.au/school/medicine
- Monash University (Victoria) www.monash.edu.au
- University of Adelaide (South Australia) www.health.adelaide.edu.au
- University of Auckland (New Zealand) www.health.auckland.ac.nz
- University of Melbourne (Victoria) www.medicine.unimelb.edu.au
- University of New South Wales (New South Wales) www.med.unsw.edu.au
- University of Newcastle and University of New England (New South Wales) www.newcastle.edu.au/jmp/ or www.une.edu.au/for/future-students/medicine.php
- University of Western Australia (Western Australia) www.meddent.uwa.edu.au
- University of Otago (New Zealand) www.micn.otago.ac.nz
- University of Tasmania (Tasmania) www.healthsci.utas.edu.au/medicine/index.html
- University of Western Sydney (New South Wales) [www.uws.edu.au/health science](http://www.uws.edu.au/health%20science)

Universities offering degrees in medicine with graduate entry programs are:

- Flinders University (South Australia) www.som.flinders.edu.au
- Deakin University (Victoria) www.deakin.edu.au/hmnbs/medicine
- Griffith University (Queensland) www.griffith.edu.au/health/school-medicine
- Australian National University (Australian Capital Territory) www.medicalschool.anu.edu.au
- University of Melbourne (Victoria) www.medicine.unimelb.edu.au
- University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney (New South Wales) www.nd.edu.au/sydney/schools/medicineindex.shtml
- University of Notre Dame, Australia (Western Australia) www.nd.edu.au/fremantle/schools/medicine/medFreo.shtml
- University of Queensland (Queensland) www.som.uq.edu.au/som/index.htm
- University of Sydney (New South Wales) www.medfac.usyd.edu.au
- University of Western Australia (Western Australia) www.meddent.uwa.edu.au
- University of Wollongong (New South Wales) www.uow.edu.au/gsm

University medical school courses are accredited by the AMC or MCNZ and vary in length from four to six years.

Pre-vocational training

The second phase in the medical education process is known as pre-vocational training, and usually involves the graduate's first two postgraduate years. In Australia these are done under the auspices of jurisdiction based Postgraduate Medical Councils. In New Zealand they are done under the auspices of the Education Committee of the MCNZ.

Postgraduate vocational training

Postgraduate vocational training, the third phase in the medical education process, is the responsibility of the specialist medical colleges. Some of these colleges, including the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, offer training within a number of specialties.

The AMC and/or MCNZ accredit these colleges and determine what specialties and qualifications they may offer medical graduates. The specialties recognised by the AMC and by the MCNZ are listed on their respective websites (www.amc.org.au and www.mcnz.org.nz).

The specialist medical colleges are:

- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) www.acem.org.au
- Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) www.dermcoll.asn.au

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- Australasian College of Sports Physicians (ACSP) www.acsp.org.au
- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) www.anzca.edu.au
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) www.acrrm.org.au
- College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand (CICM) www.cicm.org.au
- Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons (RACDS) www.racds.org
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators (RACMA) www.racma.edu.au
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) www.racp.edu.au
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) www.surgeons.org
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) www.ranzcog.edu.au
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) www.ranzco.edu.au
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) www.ranzcp.org
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) www.racgp.org.au
- Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA) www.rcpa.edu.au
- The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR) www.ranzcr.edu.au

Continuing professional development

Upon successful completion of the SET program, candidates receive their Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and may use the FRACS post nominal identifier. They may work independently as surgeons within the specialty in which they qualified.

The College believes, however, that a good surgeon never stops learning. It therefore requires its Fellows to undertake an ongoing course of continuing professional development. In Australia the specialist colleges' continuing professional development courses are accredited by the AMC. In New Zealand, this is the responsibility of the Medical Council of New Zealand.

In both countries medical practitioners must provide evidence of continuing professional development activities as a condition of their annual renewal of registration.

Recent Reforms to Health Practitioner Regulation

In March 2008, Australia's Federal, State and Territory governments signed an agreement whereby a single national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals would take effect from 1 July 2010.

Essentially a centralisation of the registration and accreditation functions, the new arrangements will facilitate the movement of health professionals across state and territory boundaries.

In the field of medicine, two key organisations have been established as a part of this reform process.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) is the organisation responsible for the registration and accreditation of ten health professions across Australia. These ten professional groups are: chiropractors, dental care practitioners, medical practitioners, nurses and midwives, optometrists, osteopaths, pharmacists, physiotherapists, podiatrists and psychologists.

AHPRA supports ten National Boards in implementing the national registration and accreditation scheme.

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In the case of medicine, the new National Board is known as the Medical Board of Australia.

The Medical Board of Australia oversees the registration function which, until 30 June 2010, was performed by Australia's eight State and Territory based Medical Boards. As of 1 July 2010, these State and Territory based boards have become committees of the National Board.

The functions of the Medical Board of Australia include registration of medical practitioners, the development of professional standards in medicine, the investigation of complaints made against medical practitioners and the assessment of International Medical Graduates (IMGs) seeking to practise in Australia.

As part of the reform package it was agreed that a committee independent of the National Board would have responsibility for the accreditation process. In the case of medical practitioners it was decided that the AMC will perform the functions of this committee, continuing to perform its existing role, for a transitional period of three years from 1 July 2010.

In New Zealand the MCNZ continues to have overarching responsibility for the registration of doctors.

It:

- authorises the registration of practising doctors;
- maintains a medical register of practising doctors;
- issues annual practising certificates only to doctors who have maintained their competence to continue practising medicine;
- monitors the training of medical students and new doctors to ensure their medical education is appropriate;
- requires doctors to continue their medical education once they enter the workforce;
- can require a doctor to receive treatment if he or she is suffering from an illness which is affecting his or her practice;
- can suspend a doctor's practice; and
- carries out performance assessments of doctors in response to a concern expressed by a patient, colleague or any other person.

International Medical Graduates (IMGs)

IMGs with a specialist surgical qualification may apply to the AMC or the MCNZ for assessment of their experience and skills. The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons is then asked to determine their comparability to an Australian or New Zealand trained surgeon.

If the assessed IMG is deemed comparable, he or she is supervised for a period of time prior to achieving a College Fellowship. Sometimes passing the College's Fellowship examination may be required to demonstrate comparability to an Australasian Fellow. If the IMG is assessed as not comparable, it is recommended that he or she apply for the College's Surgical Education Training Program, just as an Australian or New Zealand medical graduate wishing to become a surgeon does.

This process of assessment acts as a safeguard, ensuring that IMGs seeking to work or train as surgeons have achieved the same required standards as their Australian or New Zealand counterparts.