



Pharmacy Workforce Issues

Mrs Elizabeth Frost, President of the Australian Pharmacy Council (APC) recently spoke at the Australasian Pharmaceutical Science Association about pharmacy workforce issues.

The APC is the peak body for the registering authorities and has three areas of responsibility relating to workforce

- 1) Accreditation of Schools of Pharmacy
- 2) Determining nationally consistent processes regarding registration of graduates
- 3) Recognition of overseas trained pharmacists

Ten years ago a shortage of pharmacists was identified and various measures introduced such as a substantial increase in the number of pharmacy schools, programs and students; and pharmacists put onto the Occupation in Demand list for skilled migration.

Initially the results were pleasing but increasingly over the last few years significant problems have developed.

- Shortage of academic pharmacists for the 16 pharmacy schools resulting in the APC limiting its accreditation approval periods
- Some schools have difficulty in providing facilities and funding for research and become less attractive to academic staff
- Difficulty in providing experiential learning due to the increasing demand
- Significant cost of time and effort on the part of the preceptor. The flow on effect is reduced capacity of the profession to provide quality pre-registration training for graduates

Overseas trained pharmacists must pass an examination (Stage I) before being able to enter a pre-registration period of supervised practice concluding with a competency examination (Stage II) prior to registration. In 2006 there were 91 people who successfully completed Stage II, but in 2007 in NSW alone there are 112 close to completing Stage II who are seeking a pharmacy position. While there continue to be pharmacist shortages in rural and remote areas, this is not the case in metropolitan Australia.

Fee paying students and offshore university partnerships also put strain on experiential learning and pre-registration training placements. In 2006 153 locally trained, overseas students applied for skills recognition for the purpose of migration.

The APC is exploring payments to preceptors to recompense them for training they undertake and reviewing options to ensure sufficient quality pre-registration training positions are available. The APC has also prepared training materials for the students and posted an alert on its website to overseas trained pharmacists regarding the possible difficulty in finding pre-registration training positions.

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Contact Persons

Mrs Elizabeth Frost
President
Australian Pharmacy Council
Tel: 02 6262 9628

Ms Lyn LeBlanc
CEO
Australian Pharmacy Council
Tel: 02 6262 9628