



The Hon. Jillian Skinner MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Medical Research

H12/74455

The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Health
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

28 SEP 2012

Dear Minister

I refer to your recent letter proposing one-off funding of \$10M from the Commonwealth Government to help support 100 intern positions in the private sector in 2013 for international full fee paying medical students graduating from Australian universities. I note that you have made this proposal conditional upon States and Territories establishing and funding within public hospitals the balance of additional positions required to accommodate all remaining international fee paying graduates seeking a place in 2013.

You will be well aware that as a result of the Commonwealth funding model for Universities, Medical Schools have increasingly relied on fee-paying international students to help fund their courses. Between 2005 and 2012 domestic medical student numbers at NSW universities have increased by 110% and at the same time the number of international full fee paying medical students at NSW universities has grown by 92%.

I note that you have offered funding for one year (2013) however Medical Training Review Panel Report indicates that the number of medical graduates who require an internship will continue to grow and your proposal does not address the future need for intern places.

I also take the opportunity to reiterate NSW's strong track record in meeting the training requirements of medical graduates. It has consistently increased the number of intern positions in public hospitals, with a record 920 positions available for 2013, an increase of 70 on 2012 and 290 since 2008. In addition NSW funds 6 intern places reserved for graduates of the ACT. This represents a close to 50% increase in funded intern places by NSW since 2008.

NSW also provides a guarantee beyond that agreed to at COAG in providing intern positions for all domestic graduates of NSW universities irrespective of whether they are HECS supported students or full fee paying students.

In addition to NSW graduates, 79 domestic graduates of interstate universities have accepted offers of intern training opportunities in NSW for 2013. NSW health has also now commenced making offers to some international full fee paying medical graduates of NSW universities to the extent it can accommodate them within the 920 established positions.

As you can see, NSW has invested significantly in intern places in 2013 - around \$100M. This is in addition to providing clinical places for undergraduate medical students in our public hospitals.

You advise that your conditional funding of \$10M will be redirected from the Prevocational General Practice Placements Program. This Program is a successful initiative where Regional Training Providers work with public hospitals to complement interns' and other young doctors' hospital training with exposure to General Practice. This is vital in helping the Commonwealth address the significant GP shortage, and I would seek an assurance that the Commonwealth is not proposing to defund these positions in order to create the proposed 100 positions.

I note that you intend to require a 'return of service' obligation from international medical students who take up a Commonwealth funded internship in the private sector to ensure that they work in an area of workforce need after registration. I seek further details of how this will work and how the Commonwealth proposes to address the practical difficulties associated with such a proposal. You should note that in NSW, doctors in their first and second years can only work in facilities that have been accredited by the NSW Health Education and Training Institute. This ensures they are provided adequate support and supervision for safe practice. It is neither feasible, nor safe to place doctors immediately following their intern year in areas of workforce need in rural locations as the required level of supervision and support would not be available.

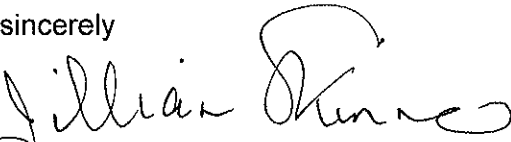
Furthermore any suggestion that providing internships to international medical students will reduce Australia's reliance on overseas trained doctors in the next few years is misguided. The vast majority of overseas trained doctors employed in NSW hospitals have a number of years of postgraduate experience, many with specialist qualifications obtained from countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, etc. These doctors provide care to patients at a more senior level than that of doctors who have recently graduated.

NSW Health has kept the NSW Medical Deans and medical students fully informed about the future availability of intern positions in the NSW public health system, and the likelihood that some international medical graduates may not be successful in obtaining an internship in NSW. Furthermore NSW has raised this issue in national forums since 2010.

While timeframes are now very tight for the start of the 2013 clinical year, the NSW Health Education & Training Institute will do all it can to expedite the accreditation process for any additional positions that the Commonwealth is prepared to fund, in addition to the accredited 920 positions which NSW has already funded and established.

I support the AHMAC decision for Queensland Health to develop a discussion paper on the coordination of a 'national application process' for intern placement and will provide further feedback on the proposal via this process.

Yours sincerely



Jillian Skinner MP

CC: NSW Deans of Medicine