

AUSTRALIAN DOCTOR NEWS

Is Australia losing its allure to overseas GPs?

There's been a rapid fall in the number of specialist overseas doctors coming through the RACGP's Practice Experience Program

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By Kemal Atlay

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Alarms are being raised over a rapid decline in the number of IMGs coming into Australia with overseas GP qualifications.

Last year, there were 52 applications for the RACGP's Practice Experience Program (PEP) Specialist Stream, which is open to doctors with GP training from a country overseas.

In contrast, the college received 192 applications for overseas specialist recognition in 2019 and 353 applications the year before that.

The college said the fall was largely a result of the COVID-19 crisis and the closure of international borders.



Martina Stanley.

But GP recruitment firm Alecto Australia claimed there were problems with the stream — which was introduced in September 2019 — because it no longer granted automatic fellowship to GPs trained in 'comparable' countries, like the UK and Canada.

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Instead, those with “substantially comparable” training were now required to work under supervision and undergo up to 12 months of training modules before being granted RACGP fellowship.

Those deemed “partially comparable” had to stay in the program up to two years and pass all RACGP fellowship exams.

The firm’s CEO, Martina Stanley, said it had also been treated as a workforce distribution tool, with all participants required to work in non-metro areas, so-called MM 2-7 locations.

“The government has put in a lot of extra requirements around locations where IMGs can get recognition for their overseas qualifications, and that's severely limited their opportunities,” she said.

"They have just closed so many avenues for doctors to be working, and this is affecting all of Australia, not just the cities."

The RACGP blamed the pandemic; however, there were other factors, including a rapid influx of specialist IMGs from 'comparable countries', like England and Canada, just before the PEP program came into being.

It also said applications for the latest cohort had “closed with a healthy number of applicants” despite the difficulty of bringing in doctors from overseas during the past 18 months.

Historically, about 2000 IMGs come to Australia each year compared to around 3700 new domestic graduates entering the medical workforce.

However since the pandemic, the IMG number has fallen by around a third, according to the Federal Health Department.

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