



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa

**Submission from the New Zealand Psychological Society
on the discussion paper**

**“Workforce Requirements for New Models of Service Delivery:
Proposed Changes to the General Practice Education
Programme”**

9 June, 2011

Introduction

Thank you for inviting the New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPsS) to comment on the changes to the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners' (RNZCGP) general practice education programme (GPEP). Many psychologists have close working relationships with general practitioners and we value the opportunity to comment on these changes. Our comments are noted below.

Context for the delivery of general practitioner services

The NZPsS is supportive of healthcare delivery being more focused on community settings where inter-professional services can be accessed by those who need them. Any consideration of general practice workforce development should take into account the financial, geographical and cultural barriers which impact on accessibility of health care services. We are supportive of a greater integration of medical and allied health services being delivered in community and institutional settings.

We are also of the view that there is a need for creative thinking around making general practice services more accessible for the large number of New Zealanders who are in employment and have difficulty accessing services for themselves and their children during working hours.

Supporting recruitment to vocational training in general practice

The NZPsS is supportive of the proposal to expose PGY1&2 doctors to general practice as early as possible in their medical training not only to stimulate interest and enthusiasm in general practice but to orientate medical students to primary and community care.

Exposure to the roles of other health professionals

We consider it important that undergraduate, PGY1&2 and general practice trainees receive a greater level of exposure to the skills and services that other health professionals offer. This can best be achieved by inter-professional training which breaks down the professional barriers which can get in the way of appropriate referrals, cooperation and collaboration. We believe that there is scope for a greater level of collaborative health care delivery between allied health professionals and general practitioners and that having inter-professional contact as early as possible in educational programmes is highly desirable.

Advanced Competency Modules

We would like to see a greater emphasis in general practice education on mental health given the high prevalence of anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol

problems in primary health care. Research by Bruce Arroll from the University of Auckland and others suggests that mental health issues may be under diagnosed in general practice which suggests that further training in this area would be beneficial.

We note in the discussion paper that an advanced competency module on mental health and addictions is being developed in partnership with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. The NZPsS can see benefits in psychologists contributing to the development of this module to ensure that general practice trainees are aware of the broad scope of evidence-based treatments which their patients can access from psychologists as well as general practitioners and psychiatrists.

We also suggest that in the development of other advanced competency modules that collaboration is sought from groups other than medical colleges to draw on the expertise of psychologists and other allied health professionals.

Given the unmet health needs of Māori and Pacific peoples we consider it important that advanced competency modules are developed to assist general practice trainees to gain skills in meeting the needs of these particular populations.

Education related to Professional Supervision for General Practitioners

The NZPsS would like to see professional supervision for general practitioners being viewed as an essential component of the professional life of all general practitioners. We see this going beyond and to a greater depth than the Medical Council requirement for a “collegial relationship. We believe that professional supervision is important not only for competent practice but also for the self-care and wellbeing of general practitioners who undertake complex and demanding work.

Having GP trainees learn about and engage in professional supervision during their general practice education would create a culture where professional supervision is viewed as a normal and necessary part of maintaining competent practice and contributing to self-care. We believe that professional supervision needs to be an implicit component of the curriculum. Many psychologists are experienced in providing supervision and could make a useful contribution to the delivery of this part of the GPEP curriculum.

Academic Study

There is little information in the discussion document about the educational objectives for a compulsory academic study component being introduced into the GPEP curriculum. We assume that this part of the curriculum would be delivered by one or more of the university departments of general practice/primary care.

We consider that this addition could be very useful to general practice trainees and even more so if collaborative research with members of other professions was a component of it.

In Conclusion

This submission has addressed a number of issues in relation to the proposed changes to the RNZCGP general practice education programme. We are supportive of the changes suggested but note the importance of a greater level of inter-professional content and collaboration throughout the programme. We also note the importance of education about and engagement with professional supervision being a core component of the curriculum and the value of developing advanced competency modules in Māori and Pacific health. The Society is very willing to be contacted by the RNZCGP if we can assist further.

About the New Zealand Psychological Society

The Society is the largest professional association for psychologists in New Zealand. We have over 1200 members and subscribers. The majority of our members are psychologists who are registered professionals who have postgraduate university qualifications in psychology.

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