OVERSEAS TRAINED DOCTORS IN RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA: DO THEY PRACTISE DIFFERENTLY FROM AUSTRALIAN TRAINED DOCTORS?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of contents ...................................................................................................................... i
List of tables ............................................................................................................................... vii
List of figures ............................................................................................................................. ix
Abbreviations .............................................................................................................................. x
Definitions ................................................................................................................................. xii
Abstract ..................................................................................................................................... xiii
Thesis declaration .................................................................................................................... xv
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. xvi

INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT OF STUDY ........................................................................... 6

1.1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 6

1.2. MEDICAL WORKFORCE PLANNING .................................................................. 7

1.3. GEOGRAPHIC MALDISTRIBUTION OF MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ............. 9

1.3.1. Geographic maldistribution of the medical practitioners in Australia ............ 11

1.3.2. Definition of rurality ............................................................................................ 14

1.3.3. Rural general practice functions ....................................................................... 15

1.4. POLICY INITIATIVES ADDRESSING GEOGRAPHIC MALDISTRIBUTION ... 17

1.4.1. The determinants of geographic location of medical practitioners ............... 17

1.4.2. Policies to influence the decision ........................................................................ 18

1.4.2.1. Regulatory/administrative approaches ......................................................... 18

1.4.2.2. Funding/payment approach .......................................................................... 19

1.4.2.3. Return of service approach .......................................................................... 20

1.4.2.4. Education/training approach ....................................................................... 21

1.4.2.5. Market-based approach/supply expansion approach ................................. 22

1.4.2.6. Other approaches ......................................................................................... 23

1.5. USE OF OVERSEAS TRAINED DOCTORS AS A WORKFORCE SOLUTION – AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ......................................................... 26

1.5.1. Canada ............................................................................................................... 27

1.5.2. United States of America .................................................................................. 29

1.5.3. New Zealand ...................................................................................................... 31

1.5.4. United Kingdom ................................................................................................. 32

1.5.5. Other research areas related to OTDs ............................................................... 33

1.5.5.1. Quality of care ............................................................................................. 33

1.5.5.2. Globalisation ............................................................................................... 34

1.6. SUMMARY ................................................................................................................... 37
CHAPTER TWO: THE USE OF OVERSEAS TRAINED DOCTORS AS A MEDICAL WORKFORCE SOLUTION – THE AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE .........................39

2.1. INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................39

2.2. ROLE OF OTDS IN MEDICAL SUPPLY IN AUSTRALIA .................................................39

2.3. OTD WORKFORCE POLICIES, 1990–98 ...........................................................................40
   2.3.1. Limitations on numbers sitting the AMC exams .......................................................40
   2.3.2. Immigration changes .................................................................................................40
   2.3.3. Labour market agreement with Queensland and Northern Territory ......................44
   2.3.4. Changes to the Health Insurance Act ........................................................................44

2.4. OTD WORKFORCE POLICIES 1999–2003 ....................................................................45
   2.4.1. 5 Year OTD Scheme ....................................................................................................45
   2.4.2. More doctors for outer metro measure ....................................................................46
   2.4.3. Australian trained international medical students ......................................................46
   2.4.4. Strengthening Medicare initiatives ...........................................................................47

2.5. CURRENT DEBATE ON ROLE OF OTDS ........................................................................48
   2.5.1. Supply of medical practitioners ..................................................................................49
   2.5.2. Distribution of OTDs ..................................................................................................49
   2.5.3. Quality of OTDs .........................................................................................................51

2.6. PROFILE OF OTDs IN AUSTRALIA .................................................................................52
   2.6.1. Types of OTDs ............................................................................................................53
   2.6.2. OTD migration rates ....................................................................................................56
      2.6.2.1. Source of OTDs .................................................................................................57
      2.6.2.2. Speciality ..............................................................................................................58
      2.6.2.3. Geographic distribution ......................................................................................59

2.7. 5 YEAR OTD SCHEME ......................................................................................................60
   2.7.1. National guidelines .....................................................................................................61
      2.7.1.1. Rural areas only ..................................................................................................61
      2.7.1.2. District of workforce shortage ............................................................................62
      2.7.1.3. Provider number arrangements .........................................................................62
      2.7.1.4. Access to Medicare rebates ..............................................................................62
      2.7.1.5. Permanent residency .........................................................................................62
      2.7.1.6. Moving to another state ....................................................................................63
      2.7.1.7. Assessment of skills ..........................................................................................63
   2.7.2. Outcomes of 5 Year OTD Scheme .............................................................................63
      2.7.2.1. Enrolment and distribution of OTDs in the program .......................................65
      2.7.2.2. Characteristics of OTDs enrolled in the program ............................................66
2.7.2.3. Completion of scheme requirements .....................................................68
2.7.3. Other research relating to the 5 Year OTD Scheme ...............................69
2.8. SUMMARY .............................................................................................................71

CHAPTER THREE: THE STUDY DESIGN .................................................................73
3.1. RATIONALE FOR MIXED METHOD DESIGNS .............................................73
3.2. MIXED METHOD DESIGNS ..............................................................................75
3.2.1. Sequential explanatory design .................................................................75
3.3. THE STUDY DESIGN .......................................................................................76
3.4. QUANTITATIVE DATA ......................................................................................78
3.4.1. Sources of data ............................................................................................78
3.4.2. Definition of rurality utilised in this study ..................................................84
3.4.3. Identification of the study groups and their description .............................85
3.4.4. Study variables ............................................................................................86
3.4.5. Statistical model ..........................................................................................89
3.5. QUALITATIVE DATA .........................................................................................90
3.5.1. Rationale for the focus groups ....................................................................90
3.5.2. Number of focus groups ............................................................................91
3.5.3. Selection of focus group sample .................................................................91
3.5.4. Recruitment and consent and confidentiality .............................................92
3.5.5. Development of focus group questions .....................................................92
3.5.6. Approach to the analysis of the focus groups ............................................93
3.6. ETHICS APPROVAL .......................................................................................95

CHAPTER FOUR: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS .......................................................96
4.1. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS ..............................................................................96
4.1.1. GP characteristics .......................................................................................96
4.1.1.1. Sex ........................................................................................................96
4.1.1.2. Age groups .........................................................................................97
4.1.1.3. Years since graduation ........................................................................97
4.1.1.4. Work status ........................................................................................98
4.1.1.5. Location of practice ............................................................................99
4.1.2. Service characteristics ..............................................................................99
4.1.3. Patient characteristics ..............................................................................104
4.2. SERVICE ITEM RESULTS ...........................................................................105
4.2.1. Main effect interactions between type of practitioner, GP characteristics and service items ..............................................................105
4.2.2. Post hoc comparison of adjusted rates ......................................................107
Appendix 1: Description of geographic maldistribution in selected countries
Appendix 2: Summary of Health Insurance Act, Sections 19AA and 19AB
Appendix 3: Recruitment letter for focus group and consent form
Appendix 4: Question guide for focus groups
Appendix 5: Summary of quantitative results provided to participants in the focus group
Appendix 6: University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee approval
Appendix 7: Detailed results of the logistic regression analysis
Appendix 8: Summary of studies indicating influences on patterns of service
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: MeSH terms and key words used in review of the literature........................................3
Table 2: Summary of medical practitioner to population ratios per 100 000 in selected countries..........................................................11
Table 3: Percentage of medical practitioners by type and location, 1998 .........................12
Table 4: General practitioners per 100 000 population by location of practice, 1997–2003 ..........................................................13
Table 5: GP to population ratio per 100 000 by regional area, 2003........................................14
Table 6: Summary of policies and strategies used to address geographic maldistribution and those utilised in Australia ........24
Table 7: Number of medical practitioners and percentage of OTDs in workforce for selected countries.........................................................26
Table 8: Summary of key Australian workforce policies related to OTDs, 1990–2005 ..........41
Table 9: Entry processes for overseas trained doctors to Australia by visa type................54
Table 10: Number of OTDs granted permanent residency and temporary visas, Australia 1984–85 to 2003 .......................................................56
Table 11: TRDs by visa class, 1999–2000 ...............................................................................57
Table 12: Percentage of medical practitioners migrating temporarily to Australia by country of previous residence, 1992–93 to 1999–2000 .............................................58
Table 13: Number of TRDs entering Australia in 1999-2000 ........................................59
Table 14: Region of main job for permanent and temporary resident overseas trained medical practitioners, 2002 and 2003........................................................................69
Table 15: Classification of assessment of GP skills .................................................................64
Table 16: OTDs participating in the 5 Year OTD Scheme 2000–03....................................65
Table 17: Summary of demographic characteristics of OTDs in the 5 Year OTD Scheme and all rural GPs, 2003 ..................................................67
Table 18: Percentage of OTDs who had worked in a previous work location in Australia by state/territory, 2003 ..................................................68
Table 19: Commencement year and expected completion year of OTDs in scheme, 2003 ....68
Table 20: Source of OTDs recruited by RWAs in Queensland and Western Australia ....70
Table 21: Summary of data sources on GP services in Australia ..............................................80
Table 22: RRMA classification ................................................................................................85
Table 23: GP service items (MBS) selected for multivariate analysis ...................................87
Table 24: GP quality items selected for analysis.......................................................................88
Table 25: Final coding template used for the analysis of the focus group data....................94
Table 26: Summary of comparison groups of ATDs and OTDs, 2002 ................................96
Table 27: Sex of GPs by type of practitioner, 2002.................................................................96
Table 28: Age of GPs by sex and type of practitioner, 2002 ..................................................97
Table 29: Years since graduation by sex and type of GP, 2002 ..............................................98
Table 30: Work status by sex and type of GP.........................................................................98
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Temporary and permanent migration levels, 1984–2003 and effect of different policies .......................................................................................................................48

Figure 2: Main pathways to general practice for OTDs in Australia........................................55

Figure 3: Temporary resident overseas trained medical practitioners by occupation and region, 1998 ...........................................................................................................................60

Figure 4: Sequential explanatory design...................................................................................76

Figure 5: The study design........................................................................................................77

Figure 6: Age distribution of patients of ATDs and OTDs, 2002 .................................................104

Figure 7: Conceptual model of patterns of service differences between OTDs and ATDs....127

Figure 8: Schematic representation of the relationship between types of services and types of practitioners (OTD vs ATD)..............................................................................................................139
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACRRM</td>
<td>Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMC</td>
<td>Australian Medical Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMWAC</td>
<td>Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTRDs</td>
<td>Area of need temporary resident doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARIA</td>
<td>Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASGC</td>
<td>Australian Standard Geographic Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATDs</td>
<td>Australian trained doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEACH</td>
<td>Bettering the Evaluation And Care of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Confidence intervals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CME</td>
<td>Continuing medical education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPD</td>
<td>Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr DOC</td>
<td>Dr Duty of Care program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECG</td>
<td>Electrocardiogram</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPC</td>
<td>Enhanced primary care</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRACGP</td>
<td>Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTE</td>
<td>Full-time equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMC</td>
<td>General Medical Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General practice/general practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HbA1c</td>
<td>Glycated haemoglobin</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMGs</td>
<td>International medical graduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBS</td>
<td>Medicare Benefit Schedule</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRP</td>
<td>National Reference Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMPs</td>
<td>Other medical practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTDs</td>
<td>Overseas trained doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIP</td>
<td>Practice Incentive Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAB</td>
<td>Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACGP</td>
<td>Royal Australian College of General Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAMUS</td>
<td>Rural Australia Medical Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDWA</td>
<td>Rural Doctors Workforce Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>RRMA</td>
<td>Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area – see section 3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>RRMEO</td>
<td>Rural and Remote Medicine Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTPs</td>
<td>Regional training providers</td>
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<td>RWAs</td>
<td>Rural workforce agencies</td>
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<td>RWAV</td>
<td>Rural Workforce Agency Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tas.</td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRDs</td>
<td>Temporary resident doctors</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic.</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WACRRM</td>
<td>Western Australian Centre for Rural and Remote Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WONCA</td>
<td>World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians commonly referred to as the World Organization of Family Doctors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWAMI</td>
<td>Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho</td>
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DEFINITIONS

Overseas trained doctors

The term ‘overseas trained doctors’ (OTDs) refers to doctors whose medical training has not occurred in the country in which they are currently practising. This term is used most consistently in Australia, but other countries use different terms. For example, in the past the United States (US) referred to these doctors as ‘foreign medical graduates’. Currently the most universal term for these doctors is ‘international medical graduates’ (IMGs). However, in this thesis the term ‘overseas trained doctors’ will be used, as this is the term adopted by the Australian Government when referring to this group of doctors and is also the term used in the policy which is being analysed.

Commonwealth Government of Australia and Australian Government

During the period covered by this study, a change in terminology occurred for the federal government in Australia. Up until 2001 the term ‘Commonwealth’, as in Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, was used to describe initiatives/policies that are generated by the federal government in Canberra. Since 2001, term the ‘Australian Government’ has been adopted instead of the term ‘Commonwealth’ and to describe such initiatives. As this study covers both periods, I will use both terms, but they have the same meaning.

Medical practitioner

The term ‘medical practitioner’ is used in this thesis to describe the whole medical workforce as opposed to the medical workforce associated with a specific speciality. In the United States, the term ‘physician’ is used in the same context.

General practitioner

In Australia the term ‘general practitioner’ is used to refer to those medical practitioners who have specialised in general practice. While this term is used in a number of countries, it is not used in North America. Canada and the US use the term ‘family physician’ or ‘primary care physicians’, but for the purpose of this thesis I will use ‘general practitioner’.

Some other definitions such as rurality will be explained in detail in the text (see section 1.3.2).
ABSTRACT

Over the last seven years the recruitment of overseas trained doctors (OTDs) has formed a significant part of Australia’s policy to address the medical workforce issue of geographic maldistribution to ensure that communities in rural and remote Australia have access to adequate general practice (GP) services. This policy has not been without problems, particularly in the areas of assessment of skills and qualifications, appropriate orientation and integration into Australian communities, and retention of these doctors within rural and remote communities.

To date there has been little evidence-based research on the role of OTDs in the medical workforce in Australia. This study explores the service provision and quality of care provided by OTDs using the 5 Year OTD Scheme as the case study. In doing so, it assesses the adequacy of this strategy and discusses the implications for future workforce policies and programs.

A mixed method design was used in the study. The quantitative component involved secondary analysis of Medicare Australia data for all OTDs participating in the 5 Year OTD Scheme in 2002 and all Australian trained doctors (ATDs) practising in rural and remote Australia in the same year. A log Poisson regression model was used to assess the interactive effect of the various GP characteristics, such as age, sex, experience and practice location with OTD/ATD status on the rate of a particular service item per patient, adjusted for patient age and sex.

The qualitative component involved two focus groups with OTDs which were used to help explain the relationships between variables found in the quantitative component of the study. Template analysis was used to identify themes from the focus group.

Significantly different rates per patient between OTDs and ATDS were found across most service items and GP characteristics examined. The greatest variation was found among items relating to in-surgery consultations and non-surgery consultations such as nursing home visits. Fewer differences were found between groups relating to pathology, imaging or procedural services. Analysis of surrogate quality items identified few differences between OTDs and ATDs.
The focus group identified a number of other factors that influenced their patterns of service and accounted for some of the differences identified in the quantitative analysis. These factors included knowledge of the health care system in Australia, cultural and communication influences, health conditions of patients, patient and community attitudes, remuneration influences and training influences. These had varying degrees of influence on their patterns of service.

The reasons for the differences found between OTDs and ATDs are partially explained by the characteristics of the GPs examined and partially explained by other external influences that relate to the particular circumstances of the OTDs, such as knowledge of the Australian health care system and cultural and communication issues. Understanding the nature of practice is central to ensuring appropriate professional support measures. The study findings highlight the need for a targeted training program for OTDs that address the areas that have the greatest influence on patterns of service to ensure that rural and remote communities receive the same quality of service from OTDs as provided by ATDs.
THESIS DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give my consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available in all forms of the media, now or hereafter.

Signature: ...................................................................... Date: ..............................................
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the following people who have helped support, encourage and motivate me to achieve this goal over the last five years. With their help I was able to turn an interesting question into a research study.

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