

# 5 Medical workforce in hospitals

In 1997–98, hospitals provided treatment to 5.6 million admitted patients, who spent 22.6 million patient days in hospital (AIHW 1999b).

Thus hospitals, and their medical workforce, make a considerable contribution to the provision of health services in Australia. This chapter contains data on the characteristics of the medical workforces employed in public and private hospitals in 1997, showing considerable differences among metropolitan, regional and small rural hospitals, and between public and private hospitals. It is of particular note that almost two-thirds of medical practitioners in private hospitals were specialists and general practitioners were a further 19.6%. In contrast, specialists represented 47.3%, and general practitioners 11.6%, of doctors employed in public hospitals, where specialists-in-training and hospital non-specialists have a much larger workforce contribution. Much higher proportions of general practitioners were employed in both public and private hospitals in rural areas, than in hospitals in metropolitan areas.

## 5.1 Public hospitals

The features of public hospital medical practitioners who indicated that their main, second or third job was in a public hospital in 1997 included the following:

- 21,140 medical practitioners worked in public hospitals – 43.7% of all practising medical practitioners.
- 88.7% of all specialists-in-training worked in a public hospital, as did 82.5% of hospital non-specialists, 62.5% of specialists, 11.9% of primary care practitioners and 33.7% of non-clinicians.
- 5,654 of these practitioners were female – 26.7% of the public hospital medical workforce. This proportion was similar across most States and Territories with the lowest proportion in Tasmania (22.1%) and the highest in the Northern Territory (31.3%).
- The distribution of public hospital medical practitioners across the occupation of their main job differed by gender. Among males, 53.7% worked as specialists in their main job; 17.9% as specialists-in-training; 13.4% as hospital non-specialists; 11.1% as primary care practitioners; and the remaining 4.0% as non-clinicians, mainly as administrators (1.3%). The largest occupation group for females was specialists (29.8%), followed by hospital non-specialists (28.5%), specialists-in-training (23.5%), primary care practitioners (13.0%), and the remaining 5.2% as non-clinicians, mainly as administrators (1.4%) and public health physicians (1.1%).
- 84.0% of public hospital medical practitioners who worked as a clinician in their main hospital job were employed in metropolitan centres, along with 14.6% in rural areas and 1.4% in remote areas. By comparison, the distribution of the overall population in 1997 was 71.2% living in metropolitan centres, 25.8% in rural areas and 3.0% in remote areas.
- Specialists represented 47.3% of medical practitioners working in public hospitals, but the medical occupation distribution varied by region. Specialists comprised around 45–50% and hospital non-specialists comprised 17–22% in capital cities, metropolitan centres and large rural centres. Specialists-in-training comprised around 20% of the

public hospital workforce in metropolitan areas, 10.2% in large rural centres declining to 1.0% in small rural areas then increasing to 6.4% in remote areas mainly due to the large hospitals in remote centres such as Alice Springs. Primary care practitioners were 6.3% of the public hospital workforce in capital cities increasing with rurality to 79.3% in small rural areas. In remote areas, primary care practitioners (42.6%) and hospital non-specialists (29.0%) were predominant.

- 82.6% of medical practitioners working in a public hospital had obtained their initial qualification in Australia, while the remainder had qualified in the United Kingdom or Ireland (6.0%), Asian countries (4.8%), New Zealand (2.9%), and other countries (3.8%).
- 2.0% of public hospital medical practitioners enumerated in the AIHW labour force survey were not Australian citizens or permanent residents of Australia. Of these, 14.2% had obtained their initial qualification in Australia and 44.2% had qualified in the United Kingdom or Ireland. However many of the temporary resident overseas-trained doctors employed in hospitals in 1997 would not have been enumerated in the survey because their registration was for a fixed term of less than a year, so that they did not receive a registration renewal notice and survey form.

The AIHW also collects data on salaried medical officers in its national public hospital data collection. These are published in the *Australian hospital statistics* series of publications.

These data are for full-time-equivalent (FTE) salaried medical officers and, in addition to hospital non-specialists, include specialists-in-training and salaried specialists such as medical administrators and emergency medicine, geriatric medicine, rehabilitation medicine and occupational medicine specialists employed in public hospitals.

From 1985–86 to 1997–98, FTE salaried medical officers increased by 65.5% in public and repatriation hospitals (excluding psychiatric hospitals) – rising from 9,300 to 15,387. Over the same period, patient separations increased by 52.9% from 2.5 million to 3.8 million and patient days declined 2.0% from 16.9 million to 16.6 million, reflecting a 35.9% reduction in the average stay from 6.9 days to 4.4 days.

Between 1996–97 and 1997–98, the changes were as follows:

- an 8.3% increase in salaried medical officers, from 14,210 FTE to 15,387 FTE;
- a 3.5% increase for patient separations, from 3,642,000 to 3,771,000; and
- a 3.2% decline for average stay, from 4.5 days to 4.4 days.

**Table 24: All medical practitioners working in public hospitals: occupation of main job and region, Australia, 1997**

| Occupation of main job        | Capital city  | Other metro centre | Large rural centre | Small rural centre | Other rural area | Remote area  | Total         |
|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <i>Clinician</i>              | 15,428        | 1,575              | 1,438              | 710                | 802              | 282          | 20,236        |
| Primary care                  | 1,019         | 189                | 185                | 286                | 644              | 124          | 2,447         |
| Hospital non-specialist       | 2,753         | 364                | 336                | 96                 | 59               | 84           | 3,693         |
| Specialist                    | 8,062         | 725                | 763                | 303                | 91               | 55           | 10,000        |
| Specialist-in-training        | 3,593         | 296                | 154                | 25                 | 8                | 19           | 4,096         |
| <i>Non-clinician</i>          | 727           | 56                 | 73                 | 28                 | 10               | 9            | 904           |
| Administrator                 | 215           | 14                 | 31                 | 17                 | 2                | 3            | 283           |
| Teacher/educator              | 43            | 4                  | 2                  | 0                  | 0                | 0            | 49            |
| Researcher                    | 103           | 0                  | 0                  | 0                  | 0                | 0            | 103           |
| Public health physician       | 121           | 12                 | 16                 | 2                  | 0                | 4            | 154           |
| Occupational health physician | 33            | 3                  | 6                  | 2                  | 0                | 0            | 45            |
| Other                         | 212           | 23                 | 18                 | 7                  | 9                | 2            | 271           |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>16,156</b> | <b>1,631</b>       | <b>1,511</b>       | <b>738</b>         | <b>813</b>       | <b>291</b>   | <b>21,140</b> |
|                               | (per cent)    |                    |                    |                    |                  |              |               |
| <i>Clinician</i>              | 95.5          | 96.6               | 95.2               | 96.2               | 98.7             | 97.0         | 95.7          |
| Primary care                  | 6.3           | 11.6               | 12.3               | 38.7               | 79.3             | 42.6         | 11.6          |
| Hospital non-specialist       | 17.0          | 22.3               | 22.2               | 13.0               | 7.2              | 29.0         | 17.5          |
| Specialist                    | 49.9          | 44.5               | 50.5               | 41.1               | 11.2             | 19.0         | 47.3          |
| Specialist-in-training        | 22.2          | 18.2               | 10.2               | 3.4                | 1.0              | 6.4          | 19.4          |
| <i>Non-clinician</i>          | 4.5           | 3.4                | 4.8                | 3.8                | 1.3              | 3.0          | 4.3           |
| Administrator                 | 1.3           | 0.9                | 2.1                | 2.4                | 0.2              | 1.2          | 1.3           |
| Teacher/educator              | 0.3           | 0.2                | 0.1                | 0.0                | 0.0              | 0.0          | 0.2           |
| Researcher                    | 0.6           | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0              | 0.0          | 0.5           |
| Public health physician       | 0.8           | 0.7                | 1.0                | 0.2                | 0.0              | 1.2          | 0.7           |
| Occupational health physician | 0.2           | 0.2                | 0.4                | 0.3                | 0.0              | 0.0          | 0.2           |
| Other                         | 1.3           | 1.4                | 1.2                | 1.0                | 1.1              | 0.6          | 1.3           |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>100.0</b>  | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b>     | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>  |

## 5.2 Private hospitals

The features of private hospital medical practitioners who indicated their main, second or third job was in a private hospital in 1997 included the following:

- 5,092 medical practitioners worked in private hospitals, comprising 10.5% of all employed medical practitioners.
- 853 (16.7%) were female.
- 20.4% of all specialists worked in a private hospital, as did 7.6% of specialists-in-training, 7.4% of hospital non-specialists, 4.9% of primary care practitioners and 5.1% of non-clinicians.
- Similar to the public hospital workforce, the distribution of employment in private hospitals across main occupation differed by gender. Among males, 67.9% worked as specialists in their main job; 17.4% as primary care practitioners; 6.3% as specialists-in-training; 6.0% as hospital non-specialists; and the remaining 2.4% as non-clinicians. Specialists were the largest occupation group (45.1%) for females, followed by primary care practitioners (30.4%), hospital non-specialists (10.6%), specialists-in-training (10.0%), and non-clinicians (3.9%).
- 84.0% of private hospital medical practitioners working as clinicians in their main hospital job were employed in capital cities and other metropolitan centres; 13.8% were employed in large and small rural centres; and 2.2% were employed in other rural and remote areas. By comparison, the distribution of the overall population in 1997 was 71.2% living in capital cities and other metropolitan centres, 12.5% in large and small rural areas and 16.3% in other rural and remote areas.
- Specialists represented 64.1% of medical practitioners working in private hospitals, but the medical occupation distribution varied by region. In capital cities, other metropolitan centres, large rural centres and small rural centres, specialists comprised 56.3% to 73.3% of the private hospital workforce. In other rural and remote areas, primary care practitioners were predominant in the private hospital medical workforce (66.1%).
- 83.7% of medical practitioners working in a private hospital had obtained their initial qualification in Australia, while the remainder had qualified in New Zealand (2.6%), the United Kingdom or Ireland (5.8%), Asian countries (3.9%), and other countries (4.0%).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics also collects data on salaried medical officers and other diagnostic and health professionals in private hospitals. These data are published in the *Private hospitals* series of publications, catalogue number 4390.0.

These data are for full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff and do not separate salaried medical officers from other diagnostic and health professionals.

From 1991–92 to 1996–97, FTE salaried medical officers and other diagnostic and health professionals increased by 75.5% in private acute and psychiatric hospitals – rising from 1,005 to 1,765. Over the same period, patient separations increased by 33.0% from 1.2 million to 1.5 million and patient days increased 19.7% from 4.9 million to 5.9 million, with a 10.0% reduction in the average stay from 4.2 days to 3.8 days.

**Table 25: All medical practitioners working in private hospitals: occupation of main job and region, Australia, 1997**

| Occupation of main job        | Capital city | Other metro centre | Large rural centre | Small rural centre | Other rural and remote areas | Total             |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Clinician</i>              | 3,693        | 469                | 463                | 221                | 111                          | 4,956             |
| Primary care                  | 652          | 113                | 90                 | 69                 | 74                           | 998               |
| Hospital non-specialist       | 267          | 46                 | 23                 | 8                  | 2                            | 345               |
| Specialist                    | 2,469        | 276                | 343                | 141                | 33                           | 3,262             |
| Specialist-in-training        | 305          | 34                 | 7                  | 3                  | 2                            | 352               |
| <i>Non-clinician</i>          | 106          | 21                 | 5                  | 2                  | 2                            | 136               |
| Administrator                 | 24           | 3                  | 2                  | 0                  | 0                            | 29                |
| Teacher/educator              | 6            | 3                  | 0                  | 0                  | 0                            | 9                 |
| Researcher                    | 3            | 0                  | 0                  | 0                  | 0                            | 3                 |
| Public health physician       | 11           | 0                  | 0                  | 0                  | 0                            | 11                |
| Occupational health physician | 4            | 2                  | 0                  | 0                  | 0                            | 6                 |
| Other                         | 58           | 12                 | 4                  | 2                  | 2                            | 78                |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>3,798</b> | <b>490</b>         | <b>468</b>         | <b>223</b>         | <b>112</b>                   | <b>5,092</b>      |
|                               |              |                    |                    |                    |                              | <b>(per cent)</b> |
| <i>Clinician</i>              | 97.2         | 95.7               | 98.8               | 99.2               | 98.4                         | 97.3              |
| Primary care                  | 17.2         | 23.0               | 19.2               | 30.9               | 66.1                         | 19.6              |
| Hospital non-specialist       | 7.0          | 9.4                | 4.9                | 3.6                | 1.5                          | 6.8               |
| Specialist                    | 65.0         | 56.3               | 73.3               | 63.2               | 29.3                         | 64.1              |
| Specialist-in-training        | 8.0          | 7.0                | 1.5                | 1.5                | 1.5                          | 6.9               |
| <i>Non-clinician</i>          | 2.8          | 4.3                | 1.2                | 0.8                | 1.6                          | 2.7               |
| Administrator                 | 0.6          | 0.7                | 0.4                | 0.0                | 0.0                          | 0.6               |
| Teacher/educator              | 0.2          | 0.7                | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                          | 0.2               |
| Researcher                    | 0.1          | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                          | 0.1               |
| Public health physician       | 0.3          | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                          | 0.2               |
| Occupational health physician | 0.1          | 0.4                | 0.0                | 0.0                | 0.0                          | 0.1               |
| Other                         | 1.5          | 2.5                | 0.8                | 0.8                | 1.6                          | 1.5               |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b>                 | <b>100.0</b>      |