

7 Overseas-trained medical practitioners

Overseas-trained doctors (OTDs) have contributed greatly to the supply of medical practitioners in Australia, both as permanent additions to the workforce and as temporary residents. There were 9,701 overseas-trained doctors in the Australian medical workforce in 1996, representing 18.0% of the 47,682 employed medical practitioners.

During the last decade, monitoring of the numbers and distribution of the overseas-trained workforce has taken on increased importance.

- The medical workforce has been increasing at a much faster rate than has population growth, so the national medical workforce policy, since 1992, has been to restrict permanent net additions to the Australian workforce of OTDs to 200 per year.
- State health authorities during the 1990s have made considerable use of temporary-resident overseas-trained doctors (TRDs) to fill area of need positions in locum services, general practice and hospitals. However, in 1996, access to rendering of Medicare services became restricted to those TRDs with relevant postgraduate qualifications in their field. Current Commonwealth policy is that after 1 January 2000 no TRDs will be deemed as medical practitioners for Medicare purposes.
- State health authorities provide occupational training positions for TRDs, not only meeting international obligations to provide training but also partially filling some shortages in hospital employment.
- New Zealand medical graduates are the only OTDs whose qualifications are automatically recognised by Australian medical registration boards for practice in Australia. AMWAC and AIHW recently addressed concern that New Zealand graduates were contributing to excessive growth of the Australian medical workforce in the AMWAC and AIHW report *New Zealand Medical Graduates in the Australian Medical Workforce*. This study found that the numbers of New Zealand graduates migrating permanently and temporarily to Australia each year were similar to the numbers migrating to New Zealand.

During 1998–99, AMWAC, with the assistance of AIHW, will be undertaking a detailed analysis of the contribution of TRDs to the Australian medical workforce.

This chapter examines the 1996 distribution of OTDs in Australia (Chapter 10 provides data to 1996–97 on additions to the workforce from migration).

- There were 9,701 OTDs in 1996, of whom 1,110 had obtained their initial qualification in New Zealand (11.4%), with a further 3,782 graduates from the United Kingdom or Ireland (39.9%), 2,702 from Asia (27.9%) and the remaining 2,016 from other countries (20.8%).
- These proportions varied across States and Territories. Medical practitioners working in Western Australia and Tasmania were more likely to have obtained their initial qualification overseas – 30.1% and 31.8% respectively initially qualifying overseas – and were more likely to have qualified in the United Kingdom or Ireland – 18.4% and 17.8% respectively. In the Northern Territory, 11.8% of medical practitioners had obtained their initial qualification from Asia, compared with the national average of 5.7%.
- 43,851 (92.0%) employed medical practitioners were Australian citizens, 3,294 (6.9%) were non-citizen permanent residents of Australia and the remaining 537 (1.1%) were temporary residents.

- Of the 3,294 non-citizen permanent resident medical practitioners, 1,191 (36.2%) had obtained their initial qualification in Australia and 2,103 (63.8%) had trained overseas. Of those who were overseas-trained:
 - 43.8% were employed in primary care, 30.7% were specialists, 9.9% were hospital non-specialists, 11.1% were specialists-in-training and the remaining 4.4% were non-clinicians;
 - 41.9% had initially qualified in the United Kingdom or Ireland, 29.1% in New Zealand, 19.4% in Asia and 9.6% in other countries; and
 - 81.1% were employed in their main job in a major urban centre, 17.0% in a rural area and 1.9% in a remote area.
- Permanent resident overseas-trained medical practitioners were more likely to work in a rural or remote area if they had initially qualified in the United Kingdom or Ireland (25.4% worked in rural areas and 3.4% in remote areas), compared with those who had initially qualified in Asia (10.3% in rural areas and 0.2% in remote areas) or New Zealand (10.1% and 1.0% respectively).
- Of the 537 temporary resident medical practitioners, 399 (74.3%) had trained overseas. Of those who were overseas-trained:
 - 30.6% were employed in primary care, 28.1% were hospital non-specialists, 19.0% were specialists, 18.8% were specialists-in-training and the remaining 3.5% were non-clinicians;
 - 47.4% had obtained their initial qualification in the United Kingdom or Ireland, 22.1% in New Zealand, 15.8% in Asia and 15.0% in other countries;
 - 75.4% worked their main job in a major urban centre, 18.3% in a rural area and 6.3% in a remote area; and
 - 55.1% practised in public hospitals in their main job and 29.6% from private rooms.

Table 25: Employed medical practitioners: occupation and country of initial qualification, States and Territories, 1996

Occupation/country of initial qualification	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Primary care									
Australia	5,138	4,054	2,808	1,259	1,514	373	297	161	15,602
New Zealand	105	48	60	39	19	7	8	11	296
UK/Ireland	432	340	478	380	93	126	44	17	1,910
Asia	895	306	65	144	176	5	23	21	1,636
Other countries	615	183	110	64	22	51	22	3	1,071
<i>Total</i>	<i>7,185</i>	<i>4,931</i>	<i>3,521</i>	<i>1,885</i>	<i>1,824</i>	<i>563</i>	<i>395</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>20,516</i>
Hospital non-specialist									
Australia	1,603	762	764	261	340	90	76	45	3,943
New Zealand	80	0	23	14	5	4	1	1	131
UK/Ireland	13	15	107	37	6	6	5	5	194
Asia	102	40	22	0	10	0	7	6	186
Other countries	86	24	24	10	8	15	8	2	177
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,884</i>	<i>841</i>	<i>941</i>	<i>323</i>	<i>371</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>4,630</i>
Specialist									
Australia	4,355	3,619	1,984	1,031	1,214	218	229	77	12,727
New Zealand	145	117	103	53	58	13	10	6	505
UK/Ireland	334	243	263	258	115	58	28	3	1,306
Asia	301	167	33	45	70	17	11	22	667
Other countries	247	92	49	74	33	24	12	10	540
<i>Total</i>	<i>5,381</i>	<i>4,238</i>	<i>2,431</i>	<i>1,461</i>	<i>1,495</i>	<i>330</i>	<i>291</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>15,744</i>
Specialist-in-training									
Australia	1,345	1,174	593	269	350	68	41	25	3,864
New Zealand	49	31	14	14	10	2	5	0	126
UK/Ireland	35	43	87	47	7	4	1	0	224
Asia	44	26	22	4	2	0	4	0	102
Other countries	47	20	30	12	10	14	1	0	135
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,521</i>	<i>1,294</i>	<i>746</i>	<i>346</i>	<i>378</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>4,451</i>
Non-clinician									
Australia	683	538	289	80	135	31	67	17	1,845
New Zealand	16	18	11	2	3	0	1	1	52
UK/Ireland	65	63	34	42	16	10	4	3	237
Asia	33	50	2	8	11	3	1	3	111
Other countries	34	42	2	4	4	5	3	0	94
<i>Total</i>	<i>831</i>	<i>711</i>	<i>337</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>2,340</i>
Total									
Australia	13,125	10,146	6,438	2,900	3,556	780	710	325	37,981
New Zealand	395	214	210	121	99	26	26	19	1,110
UK/Ireland	879	704	968	765	241	204	83	28	3,872
Asia	1,374	589	144	201	270	25	48	52	2,702
Other countries	1,029	361	215	164	76	109	46	15	2,016
Total	16,802	12,015	7,976	4,151	4,242	1,144	913	439	47,682

Table 26: Permanent resident overseas-trained medical practitioners: occupation, country of initial qualification and region, Australia, 1996

Occupation/ country of initial qualification	Region of main job						Total
	Capital city	Other metro. centre	Large rural centre	Small rural centre	Other rural area	Remote	
Primary care							
New Zealand	122	12	10	10	9	4	168
UK/Ireland	244	32	40	53	68	26	463
Asia	207	10	0	6	11	0	234
Other countries	39	6	1	4	5	3	58
<i>Total</i>	<i>613</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>923</i>
Hospital non-specialist							
New Zealand	65	15	2	3	0	0	85
UK/Ireland	30	4	4	0	2	2	41
Asia	46	6	3	0	0	0	56
Other countries	18	3	3	2	0	0	26
<i>Total</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>208</i>
Specialist							
New Zealand	195	30	22	4	0	1	253
UK/Ireland	194	10	22	19	3	0	249
Asia	46	6	4	12	5	1	74
Other countries	54	4	3	8	1	0	70
<i>Total</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>646</i>
Specialist-in-training							
New Zealand	70	12	0	0	0	0	82
UK/Ireland	77	7	3	2	0	2	92
Asia	27	0	0	0	0	0	27
Other countries	32	0	0	0	2	0	33
<i>Total</i>	<i>206</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>234</i>
Non-clinician							
New Zealand	21	2	0	2	0	0	24
UK/Ireland	23	5	4	2	2	0	36
Asia	15	1	1	0	0	0	18
Other countries	14	0	0	0	0	0	14
<i>Total</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>92</i>
Total							
New Zealand	474	71	34	19	9	6	613
UK/Ireland	569	59	73	76	74	30	881
Asia	341	24	9	17	16	1	408
Other countries	156	13	7	14	8	3	201
Total	1,540	166	123	127	107	39	2,103

Table 27: Temporary resident overseas-trained medical practitioners:^(a) occupation, country of initial qualification and region, Australia, 1996

Occupation/ country of initial qualification	Region of main job						Total
	Capital city	Other metro. centre	Large rural centre	Small rural centre	Other rural area	Remote	
Primary care							
New Zealand	11	1	0	0	3	0	15
UK/Ireland	25	9	5	5	10	7	61
Asia	17	4	0	1	0	0	22
Other countries	10	0	0	0	6	7	24
<i>Total</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>122</i>
Hospital non-specialist							
New Zealand	18	2	2	0	0	1	22
UK/Ireland	32	12	11	6	0	10	71
Asia	9	0	0	0	0	0	9
Other countries	9	1	0	0	0	0	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>112</i>
Specialist							
New Zealand	23	4	1	1	3	0	32
UK/Ireland	11	3	4	3	0	0	21
Asia	10	0	0	1	3	0	14
Other countries	7	0	1	1	0	0	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>76</i>
Specialist-in-training							
New Zealand	11	3	1	0	0	0	15
UK/Ireland	32	2	0	0	0	0	34
Asia	10	3	2	0	0	0	15
Other countries	9	1	0	0	0	0	11
<i>Total</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>75</i>
Non-clinician							
New Zealand	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
UK/Ireland	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Asia	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other countries	4	0	2	0	0	0	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>14</i>
Total							
New Zealand	66	9	4	1	6	1	88
UK/Ireland	102	26	20	14	10	17	189
Asia	48	7	2	3	3	0	63
Other countries	39	3	3	1	6	7	60
Total	256	45	30	19	24	25	399

(a) There were 980 temporary resident doctors who entered Australia for employment in 1995–96, and 1,626 in 1996–97. Most entered for a stay of less than 12 months and were not included in the AIHW labour force survey. Therefore the estimates in this table refer to temporary resident doctors who were re-registering for practice at the general renewal of registration in late 1996.