

PRESS RELEASE



Increased medical school numbers welcomed - retaining them is the issue

The recommendation to increase the intake of medical school entrants by 100 places over the next 4 years, which appeared in the Medical Training Board's discussion papers released this afternoon, has been welcomed by the New Zealand Medical Students' Association. "It has become evident in recent years that New Zealand cannot continue to rely on foreign trained doctors to man our health system, and that we must make a commitment to train more of our own doctors" Anna Dare, NZMSA President said.

"Increasing the number of students taken into New Zealand's medical schools represents a long overdue step towards achieving self sufficiency in our medical workforce."

In the last 25 years there have been only two small increases in medical school numbers – one in 2003 and again in 2008, despite a growing population and a vast increase in the burden of chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity.

Ms Dare cautioned however that New Zealand's problems with retention of its medical graduates must also be addressed if the increase in medical numbers was to have any effect on solving workforce shortages. "Currently we lose 30% of our doctors overseas within the first 3 years of graduation" Ms Dare said. "Without simultaneously addressing our poor retention rates, we may simply end up training an additional 100 medical students for Australia"

Though the focus has often been on remuneration, Ms Dare believes high quality training and a system which values and respects those working within it was equally as important. "Promoting a health workforce climate that ensures our newest graduates see New Zealand as a viable place to work and train is paramount, especially as we look to further increase the number of students we train."

The Medical Training Board discussion documents also included recommendations for training and the need for broad oversight and ongoing medical workforce planning.

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