

## Forward to Fellowship—a response to Lost in the Labyrinth

### Vivienne Duggin

Rural Health West, WA

**Background:** In response to a medical workforce crisis in early 2013, Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Kambalda has seen a rapid increase in the number of general practitioners in the last 18 months. Of the 39 doctors currently working in general practice, 28 are non-vocationally registered and more than 24 have arrived from overseas in that time.

Consequently, the current status is that more than 80 per cent of the general practice workforce in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Kambalda gained their primary medical qualification overseas. This compares to 52 per cent of the whole of rural and remote Western Australia and 40 per cent nationally.

**Aim:** International medical graduates have access to high quality education at the local level by supporting them individually with exam preparation to enable them obtain fellowship of either The Royal Australian College of General Practice or Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Also, provision of social and cultural support program to enable doctors and their families integrate into the local community.

**Methodology:** A Forward to Fellowship Governance model was established underpinned by the collective impact of eight local agencies and two agencies that have a state-wide remit, thus ensuring the most efficient use of collective resources and the prevention of duplication.

The Forward to Fellowship program commenced in September 2014. A Professional and Clinical Mentor was recruited to develop and lead the education and clinical support for Forward to Fellowship. Three local medical educators were recruited to provide on-line learning modules, face to face education sessions held at the Rural Clinical School, external clinical teaching visits, and mentorship. One medical educator is an international medical graduate who completed his Fellowship exams in 2013. He is now supporting other international medical graduates. To date, 13 candidates have joined Forward to Fellowship.

A social support model was developed to provide the interface between the international medical graduates, their families and the community to assist with their assimilation into the community and their sense of being valued.

**Conclusion:** Once fellowship is obtained the current international medical graduates will then become the future trainers and supervisors of medical students, medical registrars and international medical graduates in the region. Forward to Fellowship will ensure the community has access to the best qualified medical practitioners who will deliver sustainable services for many years to come.

Provision of social and cultural support for international medical graduates and their families is integral to them remaining in the region long term.