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**Document A: OVERVIEW OF MEDICAL DEANS AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND
MEDICAL SCHOOLS OUTCOMES DATABASE (MSOD) & LONGITUDINAL
TRACKING PROJECT**

Description of the MSOD and Longitudinal Tracking Project

The *Medical Schools Outcomes Database (MSOD) and Longitudinal Tracking Project* is one of the most ambitious and important medical workforce projects of national significance undertaken in Australia. It originally grew out of discussions between the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools (now known as Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand) and the Department of Health & Ageing about the outcomes of the Rural Undergraduate Support & Coordination (RUSC) Program Review, and was initially funded as a Project of National Significance. Once established, the project soon involved staff from Rural Clinical Schools and University Departments of Rural Health. Its importance is as the foundation for evaluating outcomes of medical education programs with specified workforce objectives (including rural and areas of workforce need), assisting in medical workforce planning, and providing a national research resource.

Through Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, MSOD has initiated a national process of collecting reliable demographic, educational and career intention data on medical students across all Medical Schools in Australia. The data are stored in a national database that will provide the basis for short and long-term monitoring and reporting on outcomes of medical education programs. New Zealand medical schools have also joined the project. From 2009 onwards, graduates will be tracked through postgraduate training and into medical practice.

The decision on the data to be collected followed extensive consultation and was guided by the following stakeholders:

- Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA)
- Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA),
- Australian Rural Health & Education Network (ARHEN)
- Confederation of Postgraduate Medical Education Councils (CPMEC)
- Confederation of Postgraduate Medical Education Councils (CPMC)
- Federation of Rural Australian Medical Educators (FRAME)
- National Health Workforce Secretariat (NHWS)
- National Rural Health Students' Network (NRHSN)
- Rural Undergraduate Support & Coordination (RUSC)

The project commenced in March 2004, and is funded by the Australian Government, through the Department of Health & Ageing (DoHA). Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand retains overall responsibility for the conduct of the study and the dataset.

Each year standard reports are prepared from the total database as summary cross-sectional reports. Each medical school receives a summary report prepared from their own data. These repeated cross-sectional surveys allow comparisons between cohorts defined by time, medical school or background. More importantly, over time, the MSOD will be able to provide longitudinal data on individuals to evaluate medical education program outcomes, the effect of interventions in influencing career decisions and for long-term medical workforce planning

Applications to collect data and compile a database have received approval from the relevant Human Research Ethics Committees for each participating medical school. Any research conducted on data contained in the database requires adequate clearance from a relevant Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data can be made available to collaborating researchers for the conduct of approved research. The procedure required to gain access to these data is outlined in documents which can be accessed from the MSOD website.

Aims

The aims of the project are to:

- Provide medical schools and the Australian Government with an effective, reliable evaluation mechanism for assessing actual, long-term outcomes of educational programs, and in particular those aimed at increasing the recruitment and retention of a rural medical workforce;
- Provide an information resource for research projects for Australian medical educators which will contribute to the national and international literature on medical education;
- Determine the effectiveness of various Australian Government and university programs and interventions in influencing the career decisions of medical students;
- Provide the Australian Government with a secure, reliable source of accurate, up-to-date data for the purposes of effective long-term medical workforce planning;
- Promote strategic reform of medical education policy and programs at the university, State and Commonwealth levels in order to match program and policy frameworks with national health priorities.

Methods

All enrolling medical students are invited to participate in the MSOD and Longitudinal Tracking Project and asked to complete a short questionnaire in their commencing and final years. Paper based questionnaires are collected by individual medical schools and sent to Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand where they are entered into a single database. The questionnaire can also be completed online. They are also asked to participate in three

short follow-up surveys at 1, 3 and 5 years after they complete medical school, to record pre-vocational and vocational training experiences.

Data on the participating students' medical school experiences are collected each year by the medical schools until the completion of their medical studies. Medical school and postgraduate training experiences will be linked with information stored in publicly available registers of medical practitioners to provide outcome measures on whether they are in medical practice, and the location and type of practice.

Progress

All Australian medical schools have agreed on a minimum data set to be collected about medical students using nationally consistent definitions for key terms and concepts; and a national database to house the data has been developed. The first full survey was conducted in 2006, and will be conducted with each commencing cohort.

Data File Setup

Data are available as either a spreadsheet or as tab delimited text files. The file will include all survey items and derived variables approved for release on a project by project basis. A Data Dictionary gives a detailed description of the questions used in the survey, their source and how they are used, as well as information on the derived and calculated variables.

The survey questions and method used in the calculation of the derived variables will be described in the Data Dictionary. The first variable in each file is the Study ID, which is a unique participant identifier. Data are compiled in such a way as to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Hence, some survey items (birth date, country of birth, language spoken at home) may be removed or aggregated. These data will only be available if they are relevant to the research proposal under consideration and ethics approval has been granted.

Data from a particular year cohort will not be available until the basic data cleaning has occurred. The cleaning process involves minimising missing data, primarily by following up with medical schools and conducting consistency checks between variables. Protocols have been prepared describing the data cleaning processes and will be made available to researchers

It is up to the analyst to become familiar with and carefully examine all data before proceeding with data analysis.

Acknowledgement

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