



ANZCA

FPM

President

Australian and New Zealand
College of Anaesthetists

18 March 2024

The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Creating a sustainable anaesthetist workforce

I recently provided you with the Australian anaesthesia workforce snapshot across the country as at December 2023. Following this letter, I would like to meet with you to discuss some key workforce challenges in greater detail and to work together with your government and states and territories to implement practical solutions that build on some of the work that ANZCA has in place or has identified as key priority areas.

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), including the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) is one of the largest medical colleges across Australia and New Zealand - responsible for the postgraduate training programs of anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians.

Setting and fostering the highest standards of clinical practice, safety and high-quality patient care in anaesthesia, perioperative medicine and pain medicine is at the heart of everything we do.

We recognise that we are the interface between the profession, the public and government, and as such we are among the first to be aware of issues that may impact the clinical, administrative and ethical practice of anaesthesia and pain medicine. As a valued organisation that enjoys a high level of trust from our communities and members, we would like to meet with you to discuss some of the relevant challenges impacting our specialist workforce.

It is important that we work together to invest in a sustainable anaesthetic workforce

As you are very much aware, the health workforce continues to be a priority issue for governments and colleges alike.

To address the relevant workforce issues, it is understandable that governments are conducting relevant reviews, inquiries, independent reports and initiatives looking at how to rapidly increase the health workforce, alternative operating approaches and streamlining processes. We are collaboratively working together with governments and other key stakeholders to implement relevant recommendations in reasonable timeframes, noting that ANZCA already meets or exceeds many identified key performance indicators or guidelines.

Initiatives such as increasing specialist international medical graduate (SIMG) numbers as a relatively rapid approach may be a suitable option for a short-term strategy; however, we would like to work with you to examine increasing local trainee numbers as a longer-term strategy to build a sustainable health system.

The short supply of the anaesthetist workforce is reinforced in Ms Robyn Kruk's *Independent Review of Overseas Health Practitioner Regulatory Settings* report which states that anaesthesia is in short supply in four of Australia's largest states – New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.

However, changes associated with the workforce cannot be made in isolation by ANZCA, as we do not control the employment and funding of trainees in Australia. This is regulated by health services and state and territory health departments. We would like to directly work together with all jurisdictions to implement practical solutions on a path to deliver longer-term workforce commitment.

Advancing perioperative medicine to enable streamlined care and potential efficiencies

Another workforce efficiency item I would like to discuss is the potential benefits of perioperative medicine as a standard operating approach.

Perioperative medicine is an emerging area of patient care that involves a wide range of healthcare professionals (including nursing and allied health), working together to improve the patient experience, reduce postoperative complications, reduce inpatient hospital days and reduce early re-admissions following surgery.

Anaesthetists are crucial to surgical interventions (pre-, during and post-surgery) and play an important role in the delivery of perioperative care.

Multidisciplinary elements of perioperative care already exist in some jurisdictions, hospitals and procedures, however there isn't a consistent, national model currently in place across Australia, with varied features of perioperative care models in place highlighting the wide variation in approach.

ANZCA is a key player in perioperative medicine (with Australia seen as an international leader), leading a multi-disciplinary collaboration which developed an integrated perioperative care framework in December 2021 (updated in December 2023)¹. Associated with this, ANZCA has developed and implemented a formal perioperative medicine qualification launched in late 2023² to enhance specialists' skills and knowledge in perioperative medicine.

ANZCA is currently considering a case for change to government for implementing multi-disciplinary perioperative approaches to medicine in Australia's healthcare system and this is something I would like to discuss further.

I very much look forward to meeting with you to discuss how we can work together to enable collaborative and required workforce changes occur across the health sector, in particular the anaesthetist specialist workforce.

Yours sincerely



Dr Chris Cokis
President

¹ <https://www.anzca.edu.au/safety-advocacy/standards-of-practice/the-perioperative-care-framework>

² <https://www.anzca.edu.au/education-training/perioperative-medicine-qualification>