

Memorandum

Opportunities for the general practitioner workforce through a primary care pathway

Purpose

1. This memo provides you with the Health Workforce and System Efficiencies Committee's advice on opportunities for the general practitioner workforce through a primary care pathway, following the New Zealand Registration Examination (NZREX) pilot.
2. Committee member, Dr Bryan Betty, disclosed a conflict of interest as Chair of General Practice New Zealand and was subsequently excluded from the preparation of this advice.

Background / Context

3. NZREX provides a pathway for internationally trained medical graduates to obtain registration with the Medical Council of New Zealand to practice medicine in New Zealand. Currently this is completed within a hospital-based environment.
4. In 2022, the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora funded the NZREX Primary Care Pathway Pilot (the pilot). The pilot involved a thorough selection process, selecting a cohort of 10 candidates with a preference for a career in primary care. The aim of the pilot was to:
 - a. evaluate whether interns trained for 18 months within a primary care pathway (within a two-year internship programme) were equivalent in training as those who trained in the traditional, two-year hospital-based pathway
 - b. address the delay in appointing the NZREX doctor group.
5. In July 2024, Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora published the interim evaluation report, *NZREX Primary Care Pathway Pilot: Evaluation Document*. At the time of the report's publication, all 10 interns achieved general registration endorsement, of which seven gained access to General Practice Education Programme (GPEP) training and two intended to apply for the 2026 programme.
6. The interim evaluation report provides a number of recommendations around the NZREX programme design, development, and implementation, such as increased support for PGY1 and PGY2, pathway options, and investment in the management and administration of NZREX participants.
7. The interim evaluation report also notes that the Ministry of Health should consider adopting the pilot for New Zealand graduates to support the growth of the general practitioner workforce in New Zealand.

The Committee sees an opportunity to leverage the outcomes of the NZREX pilot to continue to grow our domestic general practice workforce.

8. The critical shortage of general practitioners across New Zealand continues to impact the capacity for primary and community care, particularly in rural areas, to meet the health needs of New Zealanders.
9. The Committee considers work needs to be undertaken to explore the design and structure of training programmes, including NZREX and the GPEP, to determine how they can better attract, recruit, and retain graduates and registrars into a career in primary and community care.
10. Acknowledging the positive outcomes of the NZREX pilot, the Committee endorses the primary care pathway and sees a significant opportunity to leverage these outcomes. A similar pathway for New Zealand graduates has the potential to address the challenges of losing trainees to other specialist care pathways and shortages in primary and community care.
11. The Committee recommends undertaking a pilot for a small number of New Zealand graduates to determine whether similar outcomes could be achieved. This would see graduates going through a primary and community care pathway, exposing them to a new way of learning within a general practice setting, as opposed to the traditional hospital-based placement.
12. If undertaken, there will need to be consideration of:
 - a) the effects of changes to the design and structure of the pathway to better suit New Zealand graduates
 - b) the role of the Medical Council of New Zealand to accredit placement sites / general practice
 - c) supervisory capacity in general practice
 - d) investment and allocation of funding.

Next steps

13. Should you wish, the Committee will provide advice to Health New Zealand and the Ministry of Health on work to explore a primary care pathway pilot for New Zealand graduates.

Dr Andrew Connolly

Chair

**Health Workforce and System Efficiencies
Committee**

Date: 25 September 2024