

TITLE PAGE

Full Title: Dermatology teaching in Australian medical schools

Short running title: Dermatology teaching in medical schools

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Dear Editor,

Universally, Australia is known to have the most elevated rates of skin malignancy.^{1,2} Skin disease, including skin cancers, are a common reason for presentation to a general practitioner (GP) and account for some 18% of visits.³ In addition 95 to 99 per cent of skin cancers are preventable and this highlights the importance of accurate diagnosis, management and prevention of skin disease in the primary care setting.² A recent Federal government enquiry into skin cancer in Australia recommended an expansion of dermatology teaching in the medical school setting, noting in particular the need for increased teaching in skin cancer management.²

In order to determine the current range of dermatology teaching within Australian medical schools, we sent an email survey to Fellows of the Australasian College of Dermatologists, inviting those who teach in the medical school setting to respond. The survey asked Fellows to report their experience and involvement with teaching at this level, including the range and number of educational activities they are involved in. We received responses from 16 dermatologists who have involvement in teaching in 13 medical schools. The authors of this report were also respondents in the survey.

Our results showed that across Australia, dermatology teaching varied from almost nothing to a comprehensive program. For example some medical schools had an extensive lecture program, but no clinical teaching while others had few lectures but abundant clinical teaching. Some had no structured program being reliant on informal teaching only. Schools differed in their access to dermatology outpatient clinics or dermatologists as teachers and this accounted for some of the variances. Some respondents reported a level of dissatisfaction with the amount of teaching they could provide and stated their students requested more teaching also.

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While noting that the results are from the perspective of the dermatologists involved in teaching only and that this may not describe the full range of teaching occurring at present, it is apparent that there is a wide variation in dermatology teaching across Australia. In the UK, the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD), have developed recommendations for dermatology content in medical schools and these have been used as means to aid standardisation across schools. However evidence to evaluate if these recommendations have been achieved is limited.^{4,5}

As a result of this preliminary work, a formal review of current dermatology teaching at the university level is underway. This aims to document the current situation in greater detail and explore additional areas such as student assessment methods. From this, we can then address the questions – do we need a standardised dermatology curriculum in Australian medical schools and can this be achieved?

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