



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



Minister for Health

MI159223
MO: H/08/09622

23 DEC 2008

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 12 November 2008 regarding the Parliament of Queensland E-Petition Number 1058-08, outlining a range of strategies to address the General Practice workforce shortage.

There are a number of workforce challenges associated with the provision of General Practice services in our communities, and these challenges are not unique to Queensland but are evident in national and international contexts. I also recognise the impact of workforce issues upon areas such as the Griffith electorate and appreciate the workforce strategies put forward by this petition to address such challenges.

I am advised that the impact of the proposal to temporarily suspend the District of Workforce shortage regulation, thereby enabling International Medical Graduates to work in metropolitan regions, would result in a significant negative impact upon the distribution, acquisition and retention of the current medical workforce. Currently, International Medical Graduates build the capacity of the Queensland Medical Workforce often through appointment to Area of Need or District of Workforce Shortage positions, and a large proportion of these positions are located in rural and remote areas. Consequently, the implementation of the proposed workforce solution may result in the inability to recruit candidates for vacancies in these areas, and this would severely impact upon the ongoing sustainability of health service provision in particular areas of Queensland.

In response to the proposal to encourage Australian trained practitioners to re-enter the medical workforce, the Federal Government is currently operating the Specialist Re-entry Program to achieve this objective. The initiative is designed to encourage eligible practitioners to re-enter the workforce through the provision of financial support to undertake learning plans and mentoring opportunities within a clinical placement. Overall this initiative assists to alleviate specialist workforce shortages and improve patient access to speciality services as increasing numbers are re-entering the medical workforce.

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In addition to this initiative, the Federal Government is also operating the General Practice Super Clinics program which aims to bring together health professionals to deliver better healthcare, tailored to the needs and priorities of the local community. The implementation of these clinics will provide extensive benefits to communities in the short and long term. In relation to attracting trainees into the General Practice vocation, the General Practice Super Clinics program will provide high quality education and training opportunities supported by infrastructure for trainee consulting rooms, teaching rooms and training facilities. Additionally, in order to strengthen local general practice, the General Practice Super Clinics will integrate with local programs and initiatives and coordinate with other health services in a partnership approach to local health service planning.

Overall, it is expected that workforce shortages will improve through the implementation of the above listed strategies and as additional numbers of medical graduates undertake prevocational training programs and move into vocational training programs. These activities will, therefore, result in an increasing number of General Practice services and increased access to services for communities throughout Queensland.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Ms Danae Gread, A/Senior Project Officer, Medical Workforce Advice and Coordination Unit, Department of Health will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone 3239 0977.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Robertson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP