

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 15, 2017**

### **ONGOING GP SHORTAGE AFFECTING AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES AND GP COSTS**

Australians in metropolitan, regional and rural areas face a severe shortage of qualified GPs and higher out of pocket costs for GP visits if the Government acts on the advice of organisations advocating to stop the flow of Overseas Trained GPs in Australia.

“If we stop the flow of overseas GPs into Australia, we will face even more serious shortages within three years and patients will pay more to get care from their GP” says Martina Stanley, Director of Alecto Australia.

We welcome the willingness of The Hon David Gillespie, Deputy Minister of Health, to listen to a broad range of perspectives and to consult reports by reputable organisations such as Health Workforce Australia which predict a severe shortfall of doctors by 2025<sup>i</sup>

“If people believe that Australian GPs will be able to fill all the GP job vacancies around the country, they are dreaming” continues Ms Stanley. “There are pockets of oversupply in some areas, but Australian GPs are not wanting to work in outer metropolitan practices where patients are largely bulk-billed and where they need to live far away from the suburbs where they themselves grew up”.

“We know practices in the western suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney who haven’t received a single application from an Australian trained GP in more than a decade. That’s not going to change anytime soon”, says Ms Stanley.

Predictions of an oversupply of GPs in 2017 are taken from a report by Health Workforce Australia (2012) but ignore the second part of the same sentence which predicts that *“the workforce would be in oversupply to 2017 before dropping to undersupply from 2020”* – just three years from now.<sup>ii</sup>

The GP workforce is ageing along with Australia’s population, older GPs are preparing to cut down their working hours or retire. At the same time, we are experiencing high population growth in all Australian cities.

Modelling provided by The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW; 2016) reported recently that *“General Practitioners had the highest proportion aged 55 or older (40.5%) of all clinician groups in 2015”* and that most of these would be retiring between 2020 and 2025.<sup>iii</sup> This means that potentially more than a third of all GPs will be retiring in the next 7 or 8 years.

Overseas Trained GPs remain an integral and vital part of Australia’s workforce. While this fact is widely acknowledged, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), AMA and Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) choose to imagine that this will suddenly change even though there is evidence of an ongoing undersupply.

Talk of an oversupply of GPs will also cause Australian students to choose hospital, specialist, and surgery career pathways instead of general practice, which is already seen as “boring” medicine to young students.

We urge the Australian people to recognize the facts and their need for good quality general practitioners to ensure their families and own health care needs can be met.

We urge the government of Australia and relevant bodies to rely on information serious workforce modelling rather than relying on the advice of organisations that may be acting out of self-interest.

**If we do not act now, we will face:**

- Higher out of pocket costs for Australians visiting their GP
- Ongoing shortages of GPs in metropolitan and rural communities
- Less access to primary health care causing more cost to the hospital system and to government

Martina Stanley is a Director of Alecto Australia Medical Recruitment & Consulting. Martina has been involved with medical workforce issues since 1996 when she established an organization to coordinate recruitment and support for 750 postgraduate medical positions each year. Martina has worked as a senior manager and healthcare consultant for more than 20 years in Australia and New Zealand.

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<sup>i</sup> Health Workforce Australia, ‘Australia’s Future Health Workforce – Doctors’ page 4, [https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/F3F2910B39DF55FDCA257D94007862F9/\\$File/AFHW%20-%20Doctors%20report.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/F3F2910B39DF55FDCA257D94007862F9/$File/AFHW%20-%20Doctors%20report.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Health Workforce Australia, ‘Australia’s Future Health Workforce – Doctors’ page 4, [https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/F3F2910B39DF55FDCA257D94007862F9/\\$File/AFHW%20-%20Doctors%20report.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/F3F2910B39DF55FDCA257D94007862F9/$File/AFHW%20-%20Doctors%20report.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Australia Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Australia’s medical workforce’ <http://www.aihw.gov.au/workforce/medical/>

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