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AMA URGES GREATER SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES (IMGs)

The AMA has written to Health Minister Nicola Roxon urging greater support for international medical graduates (IMGs) working in Australia, highlighting the problems they face in accessing basic community services such as Medicare and public education.

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said the AMA has always been a strong supporter of the role played by IMGs in providing health services in the Australian community and wants them to continue as respected and valued members of the Australian medical workforce.

“Along with better access to health and education services for IMGs, we would like the Government to abandon the current 10-year moratorium, which effectively forces many IMGs to work exclusively in rural and remote areas for 10 years or more,” Dr Pesce said.

“The Government recently introduced welcome changes to assist New Zealand IMGs, and the AMA would like to see this as being the first step in dismantling the 10-year moratorium.

“The moratorium is discriminatory and often forces IMGs to live and work in areas where they do not have access to adequate professional support and supervision or the services that will allow them to quickly become part of their communities.

“In a way, the moratorium is being used to prop up the rural and remote medical workforce, allowing governments to defer or ignore proper policies to attract and retain doctors in country Australia.

“IMGs now make up 41 per cent of the medical workforce in rural and remote areas.

“They make an enormous contribution to the medical workforce and to rural communities but this contribution is not being properly recognised or rewarded.

“IMGs are required to spend long periods in some of the most professionally challenging clinical environments, despite limited preparation for this experience and limited access to professional support and supervision. This is not in the best interests of the doctors or their patients.

“The AMA is calling on the Government to adopt a more robust package of incentives and support mechanisms to encourage the increasing numbers of locally trained doctors and appropriately skilled IMGs to voluntarily consider a career in rural and remote Australia.

“By adopting a ‘more carrot, less stick’ approach, the Government will go a long way to restoring country practice as an attractive long-term career choice for all doctors. We want to see the right people with the right skills in the right places,” Dr Pesce said.

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