

# Doctors in Vocational Training in Western Australia

A comparison of GP registrars with registrars in other training programs

Acknowledgements: PMCWA, AMA WA, T4 Consulting and Health Perspectives



# Acknowledgement of traditional owners

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## Background

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- Only 42% of medical specialists credentialed for independent practice in WA are GPs (WA Health 2018).
- General practice is preferred career choice for only 15% of final year medical students (MSOD 2019).
- To be sustainable, Australia's health care system requires a highly-functional foundation of GP-led multidisciplinary primary healthcare equitably distributed and available to all.
- Pressure from excess numbers of referral medical specialists such as cardiologists, paediatricians or ENT surgeons places huge risk on sustained cost-effectiveness in Australia's health system.

## The larger project

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- Collaboration between PMCWA and WAGPET with support from AMA WA
- Survey designed in 2018
- Two waves of administration
  - 2018 all doctors in training
  - 2019 all WAGPET GP registrars
- 34.8% return rate

## This project

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- Those in registrar training that have '*declared their hand*'
- This project extracted data from registrars to examine differences between GP registrars and all the others as a group

## Sample characteristics

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- General practice: 61 (33.5%)
- All other registrars: 121 (66.5%)
  - Physicians (adult): 35 (19.2%)
  - Paediatricians/child health: 17 (9.3%)
  - Emergency medicine: 12 (6.5%)
  - Surgery: 12 (6.5%)
  - Others: 45 (24.7%)
- All registrars (total): 182 (100%)

## Demographic comparisons

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- GP registrars had been significantly older at entry to medical school ( $p=0.01$ )
- GP registrars significantly older ( $p=0.028$ )
- GP registrars significantly more likely to have children already (65.5% v 36.4%)

## Personality traits (as many as apply)

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- At least two-thirds of GP registrars selected:
  - *responsible*
  - *loyal*
  - *helpful*
  - *determined*
  - *problem-solver.*
- One significant trait '*Ambitious*' (19.4% GP registrars v 44.6% all other registrars)

## Other personal descriptors

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- Spending time with my family
  - GP registrars: 73.8%
  - All other registrars: 54.5% (p=0.012)
- My career is important to me
  - GP registrars: 27.7%
  - All other registrars: 55.7% (p=0.021)
- I choose to have a small group of friends
  - GP registrars: 52.5%
  - All other registrars: 66.1% (p=0.007)

## Other personal descriptors

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- My life has clear direction
  - GP registrars: 19.7%
  - All other registrars: 24.8% (NS)
- Less than a quarter of entire sample selected this statement as applicable to them (specifically 23.1%)

## Decision points and changes

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- Decision certainty significantly different (7-10 on 10-pt scale)
  - Total: 72.5%
  - GP registrars: 55.7%
  - All other registrars: 81.0% ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Ever intended to pursue a different specialty?
  - Total: 70.3%
  - GP registrars: 82.0%
  - All other registrars: 64.5% ( $p = 0.015$ )

## What's on their minds?

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- Currently thinking of leaving their profession?
  - Total: 14.3%
  - GP registrars: 18.0%
  - All other registrars: 12.4% (NS)

# Key influencers

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Influencers	GP registrars (%) vs all other registrars %	Size of difference	p-value
Family	52.5% v 26.4%	26.1	0.001
Community	36.1% v 13.2%	22.9	<0.001
Friends outside of medical school	24.6% v 9.9%	14.7	0.009
Government initiatives	14.8% v 5.0%	9.8	0.023
Career expos	18.0% v 11.6%	6.4	0.23
Media reports	9.8% v 6.6%	3.2	0.44
Published information from specialty colleges	6.6% v 9.1%	-2.5	0.56
Educational events and forums	24.6% v 27.3%	-2.7	0.70
Practical rotations in medical school	60.7% v 65.3%	-4.6	0.54
Patient experience	31.1% v 40.5%	-9.4	0.22
Mentors as intern/resident	54.1% v 64.5%	-10.4	0.18
Instructor	32.8% v 45.5%	-12.7	0.10
Supervisors when intern/resident	60.7% v 75.2%	-14.5	0.04
Experience from rotations as intern/resident	60.7% v 81.8%	-21.1	0.002

# Characteristics of training program

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- Importance of six characteristics of the training program itself in choice of specialty (%)

Statement	GP registrars (%) v All other registrars (%) scoring 7-10	Size of difference	p-value
Provides good work/life balance	93.4% v 76.0%	17.4	0.004
Provides secure job opportunities immediately following training	86.9% v 56.2%	30.7	<0.001
Work flexible hours	86.9% v 35.5%	51.4	<0.001
Allows you to train in a specific locations where you wanted to live	80.3% v 47.1%	33.2	<0.001
Takes the least amount of time to complete	55.7% v 15.7%	40.0	<0.001
Has a low financial burden	49.2% v 22.3%	26.9	<0.001

# Deciding between specialties

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- Factors important in deciding between medical specialties (of 21 factors, 9 significant)

Factor	GP registrars (%) v All other registrars (%)	Size of difference	p-value
Working flexible hours	85.5% v 45.5%	40.0	<0.001
No on-call	68.9% v 36.4%	32.5	<0.001
Location	91.8% v 66.1%	25.7	<0.001
Professional relations with patients	73.8% v 50.4	23.4	0.003
Manageable workloads	88.5% v 68.6%	19.9	0.003
Can pursue non-medical interests	83.6% v 69.4%	14.2	0.039
Work/life balance	91.8% v 78.5%	13.3	0.024
Critical medicine	29.5% v 54.5%	- 25.0	0.001
Large team	37.7% v 63.6%	- 25.9	0.001

## Affective dimensions

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- Feelings during day-to-day practice in chosen medical specialty (five feelings) %
  - 0 = not important
  - 5 = somewhat important
  - 10 = very important

Factor	GP registrars (%) v All other registrars (%)	Size of difference %	p-value
Connected with and contributing to community	83.6% v 66.1%	17.5	0.01
Valued by peers	78.8% v 81.0%	-2.2	NS
Confident in the results achieved for patients	85.2% v 90.1%	-4.9	NS
Making a difference in patients' lives	85.2% v 91.7	-6.5	NS
Part of a team	75.4% v 89.3%	-13.9	0.015

## Social dimensions

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- Social aspects of chosen medical specialty %
  - Not important = 0
  - Somewhat important = 5
  - Very important = 10

Factor	GP registrars (%) v All other registrars (%)	Size of difference %	p-value
Seen by patients as caring and supportive	86.9% v 79.3%	7.6	NS
Seen as a respected member of the community	65.6% v 50.4%	15.2	NS
Knowledgeable	63.9% v 52.9%	11.0	NS
Seen as successful by medical peers	39.3% v 35.6%	3.7	NS
Seen as successful by family	39.3% v 39.7%	-0.4	NS
Seen as successful by non-medical friends	36.1% v 22.3%	13.8	NS
Prestigious	16.4% v 17.4%	-1.0	NS

## Reflections

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- While GP registrars have much in common with other registrars, these data also suggest strong affinity among GP registrars with:
  - community service and patients who benefit
  - long-term relationships with patients
  - career variety, flexibility, location
  - outward-looking personality traits
- Differences in decision uncertainty need careful consideration
- Medical ‘all-rounders’ disinclined to limit their life choices may not welcome career ‘straight jackets’ or narrow career pathways.

## Future questions: more welcome!

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- What is the best way to tap into positive affect for general practice?
- Are 'influencers' *positive* or *negative*?
- Are family and pragmatic issues outweighing professional drivers and interests in career decisions?
- What is happening to 'sense of purpose' for all registrars?
- What is an acceptable 'wastage' rate in medicine: is 14% of registrars currently considering leaving medicine too high?