

# Joint Press Release



## More GPs to benefit from Medical Assistants

**20 July 2010**

GP practices around the country are already benefiting from a new Medical Assistant training program, designed as an innovative solution to alleviate workforce pressures on practices – and more graduates are on the way.

GPpartners (Brisbane) and the Adelaide Western General Practice Network (AWGPN), through its registered training provider Healthfirst Training Australia (HFTA), marked a significant milestone in March this year celebrating the first three graduates from the Adelaide campus.

The Brisbane campus has also accepted its first 37 students, who enrolled with GPpartners in May this year, while a further eight students are currently enrolled in Adelaide.

The Certificate IV in Medical Practice Assisting has been based on a program that GPpartners developed and had accredited in Queensland in 2005, which has since been incorporated into the National Health Training Package.

GPpartners CEO, Ms Abbe Anderson, played a key role in achieving the qualification's national accreditation and is keen to see more Medical Assistants working in general practice.

"This course has been designed to equip graduates to perform the wide range of administrative and clinical assisting tasks required in the general practice setting," Ms Anderson said.

"They should not be confused with Physician Assistants or nurses, who have university qualifications. Rather, graduates are trained to assist doctors and nurses with the coordination of patient care," she said.

HFTA Executive Chair, Ms Kathy Stanton AM, believes the future of primary care in local communities will rely on the development of multi-disciplinary care teams, in support of which Medical Assistants will perform an important function.



"GPs will lead and direct these teams, with the Medical Assistant ultimately fulfilling a meaningful role under appropriate supervision and direction," Ms Stanton said.

"The timeframes associated with training more GPs are extensive and the process is expensive. It is faster and more cost effective to train Medical Assistants so that GPs can focus on what they do best.

"More importantly, patients will see sustainable improvements in healthcare and better access to general practice in their local communities," she said.

Following a meeting with HFTA in January this year to discuss the role of training and Medical Assistants in primary health care reform, Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon was keen to ensure there was no reduction in patient safety or quality of care.

However she advised, "The Australian Government supports innovative approaches to delivering high quality health care that improve access to health professionals for all Australians.

"The role of Medical Assistants is one which can be explored further in this context".

AWGPN and HFTA CEO, Dr Peter Del Fante, has thanked Ms Roxon for her support and acknowledged her concerns.

"Through industry Consultation we have identified that a high expectation will be placed on and expected of personnel working in the Medical Assistant role to ensure ongoing quality and safety," Dr Del Fante said.

"The Qualification itself is Nationally Accredited and recognised, however the issue is about ongoing accreditation and professional development activities to maintain skills, knowledge and the standard of care being provided – in the same manner as is currently in place for GPs via the RACGP and Nurses via their College," he said.

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