

# Overseas Trained Specialists and Area of Need Assessment

The assessment of overseas-trained doctors, both those seeking to practice as specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology in Australia and those seeking to fill Area of Need (AoN) positions, has undergone significant changes in the last year. These changes have been driven partly by the College's desire to further improve its processes and partly by the desire of the Australian Medical Council (AMC) to introduce a nationally consistent approach to the assessment of overseas-trained doctors. The College finds itself in the enviable position of being at the forefront of quality assessment processes, with much of its recent work in this area anticipating AMC recommendations.

## Concurrent assessment

Applicants for AoN positions are assessed against the requirements of the specific position for which they are applying. Such an assessment, although as rigorous as that for applicants for specialist recognition, did not, until recently, include an assessment for comparability to an Australian-trained specialist. The College has now introduced, for applicants for AoN positions, concurrent assessment for specialist recognition.

This concurrent assessment allows the AoN practitioner to decide which career pathway s/he wishes to take. For those assessed as 'partially comparable', the AoN position may be able to provide some of the necessary training to upskill to Fellowship.

Information detailing concurrent assessments is available to applicants, employing hospitals, supervisors and recruitment agents.

## Eligibility for interview

The assessment of Overseas Trained Specialists (OTs) seeking Fellowship includes an interview before a panel of assessors. The criteria for eligibility for an interview have been clarified in order to better inform OTs of the training they need to have completed. In order to be considered for interview, it is generally expected that applicants will have completed a specialist training program in O and G which meets the following criteria:

- The program was a structured post-graduate course of at least five years duration, with published standards that are comparable to that of the RANZCOG Training Program.
- There has been a documented and systematic in-training assessment system incorporating regular, ongoing formative and summative performance-based assessments, examinations and other assessments comparable to those undertaken by RANZCOG Trainees.
- Entry into the program was via a competitive process.
- The program was accredited against published standards by an external body and was subjected to assessment for reaccreditation at regular intervals.

## Twelve-month oversight period for OTs assessed as 'substantially comparable'

Recent changes to RANZCOG regulations now require that all overseas-trained O and G consultants, who are assessed as being substantially comparable to Australian-trained specialists, will undergo a 12-month period of oversight, at the successful conclusion of which they will be offered Fellowship of the College. This replaces the current practice of offering Fellowship immediately after a successful application and is consistent with recent directions from the AMC.

The introduction of the period of oversight is seen as an important quality control measure. During this period, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) must be undertaken and regular supervisor reports must be submitted.

## Other changes

With the introduction of a process for recognition of prior learning, unsuccessful OTs applicants, who subsequently seek and are offered a place in the RANZCOG training program, may apply for recognition of some prior learning. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Committee will determine, on a case by case basis, the amount of credit given to a particular applicant for prior learning.

There has been considerable work done in improving the assessment and upskilling process, with more guidance being given to 'partially comparable' OTs regarding the standards they are required to meet, clearer definition of training requirements and changes to performance-based assessment parameters ('partially comparable' OTs must now be assessed at senior registrar level). The time available to undertake training towards Fellowship has been reduced to a maximum of 24 months. AoN practitioners now have access to a RANZCOG CPD program through the Educational Affiliate pathway and are encouraged to pursue this during their employment in the Australian healthcare system. Further improvements have been made to the RANZCOG OTs/AoN website information to ensure that all practitioners seeking relevant information have it readily available.

The work which RANZCOG does on behalf of the AMC in assessing OTs and AoN practitioners continues to be underpinned by the generous support of Fellows who volunteer their time for this important work within the Australian healthcare workforce. Several new members were welcomed to the assessment panel group in the last year. The contribution of College House staff to this complex area of work within RANZCOG cannot be underestimated.

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