

The future of obstetric practice: group practice

We obstetricians know that obstetric practice can be highly intrusive on any other life we might like to pursue. Without active and supportive cover from colleagues it is easy to perceive a somewhat restricted future. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Fellows are choosing to cease obstetric practice in their 40s to pursue a career in gynaecology. Children, families, personal and professional lives, and marriages can suffer under the impost of a patient in labour when repeated without break. Does this seem familiar? I suspect we have all been there to some extent.

A minority of the Fellows in private practice in Australia have successfully actively pursued the formation of group specialist O and G practices.

The advantages of group practice include:

- Those who are able to embrace group practice find that they are able to extend their lives well beyond their professional domain with considerable ease and confidence.
- A group roster system allows the confident planning of social activities weeks, even months in advance. This benefits family dynamics by allowing the O and G to commit to arrangements such as school speech nights, without the spectre of a dreaded call out occurring.
- Women have the advantage of being cared for by an enthusiastic and 'fresh' O and G rather than one who has been continuously working on-call for the past few months.
- It is possible to incorporate a philosophy of midwife involvement to mutual benefit.
- You get to SLEEP at night and even go away for weekends!
- You can operate in gynaecology theatre, confident that one of the group members can look after labour ward or any emergency.
- Difficult cases can be managed together, be they obstetric or gynaecological.
- It is possible to go away to learn new procedures and to be able to have time to be preceptored in those procedures without concerns related to obstetric workload.

Recent Federal Government strategies and the latest reports from the Productivity Commission imply significant changes in the way health care will be delivered in the future. In the case of our specialty this will mean a greater role for midwives, and hence a more collaborative model of care. Such models can be incorporated into group practices.

From a personal perspective, having moved from being a solo practitioner to a member of a full group practice, the benefits far

These practices exist in different formats however, it is clear that there is a common principle driving the successful continuation of these practices. That is, each member of the group must compromise to a greater or lesser extent to allow such an arrangement to continue and for individual members of the group to realise the full potential of a group setting.

The advent of so-called 'safe working hours' has the potential to impact on solo practice in the years ahead, thus the environment of a group allows time out for individuals to recuperate from long or difficult working conditions.



James Brodribb
FRANZCOG

- Audit, case review and educational sessions can be undertaken on a regular basis.
- Illness and holidays do not disrupt the care of your patients.
- Finding a locum is not an issue and it is possible to take long periods of leave.
- Practice costs are markedly lower, with shared resources and economies of scale.

The disadvantages include:

- Personalities in medicine do not generally allow compromise easily hence not everyone is going to take readily to group practice.
- Some O and Gs are not in the position of being able to form a group if there are few, or no colleagues nearby.
- It is important to find colleagues who share a common philosophy.
- Larger staff numbers requires a better understanding of industrial laws and obligations, occupational health and safety.
- There is more paperwork.
- Trade practices issues and the ACCC become important issues with groups who are not partnerships.

outweigh the disadvantages. It has allowed me to continue an active interest in both obstetrics and gynaecology and to pursue activities outside of medicine. The support within our group has enabled each of us to extend and add to our skills and to learn new operative techniques.

It is worth considering if you can.