Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme
Western Australia

Guidelines and Parameters for new members
APRIL 2011
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1.0 Background

In 1996, Medicare provider number restrictions were introduced under section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* (the Act) as a measure to fill gaps in the private medical practitioner workforce. The legislation achieves this by restricting Overseas Trained Doctors (OTD) from accessing Medicare benefits unless they commit to working in areas that are considered to be Districts of Workforce Shortage. The restrictions apply for ten years from the date the OTD was first registered with an Australian Medical Board and is also known as the Ten Year Moratorium. A number of programs have been established that utilise this Medicare provider number restriction and the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme (Scheme) is one such program.

The Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme commenced in 1999 at a time of growing awareness of the need for more General Practitioners in rural and remote areas of Australia. During that year, the Australian Government offered to help States and Territories develop new initiatives designed to attract suitably qualified Overseas Trained Doctors to commit to working for a five year period in an area of need.

2.0 Principles & Objectives

The main objectives of the Scheme are:

- To provide incentives to attract appropriately qualified and experienced Overseas Trained Doctors to overcome the current and future community needs for general practice medical services in rural and remote Australia;
- To increase the supply of appropriately qualified OTDs in rural and remote Australia;
- To enhance the professional development, skills and knowledge of OTDs in Australia; and
- To bring a degree of stability to the provision of general practitioner services in rural and remote communities.

3.0 Australian Government Incentives

The Australian Government acknowledges the need to offer incentives to attract doctors with the appropriate qualifications and experience to work in areas of greatest need. The Department of Health and Ageing (DOHA) has helped to facilitate the development of recruitment initiatives that are nationally consistent as follows:

- Streamlined immigration procedures. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has agreed to work with DOHA to ensure that participating doctors will be granted permanent residency as soon as practicable after obtaining a vocational qualification in general practice, currently either the FRACGP or FACRRM providing all other immigration requirements are met.
- A reduction in the ten year moratorium on provider number restrictions under section 19AB of the Act. The Delegate to the Minister for Health and Ageing will grant an exemption without geographical restrictions to participating medical practitioners who have satisfied the following requirements of the Scheme:
  i) completed the required term of service in a location deemed eligible for the Scheme;
  ii) attained FRACGP or FACRRM; and
  iii) attained permanent residency and/or Australian Citizenship.
4.0 Eligibility criteria for Overseas Trained Doctors

The Scheme applies to OTDs who are restricted under section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act in accessing the Medicare benefits arrangements. OTDs wishing to participate on the Scheme must meet the following criteria:

- Appropriate registration with the Medical Board Australia;
- Provide evidence they are eligible to be assessed for FRACGP or FACRRM within two years of commencing on the Scheme or be a recognised Fellow;
- Intend to seek or currently possess permanent residency and/or Australian Citizenship; and
- Will be providing at least 7 sessions\(^i\) a week as part of their placement

\(^i\) For the purposes of this application a general practice consulting session is regarded as an average 3.5 hour period

All applicants for the Scheme are required to provide information that will enable assessment of the Overseas Trained Doctors’ eligibility to participate in the Scheme.

5.0 State Review Panel

The State Review Panel is responsible for:

- Approving the entry of OTDs onto the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme in Western Australia where required.
- Reviewing the progress of OTDs on the scheme.
- Considering and voting on the early termination of Scheme members who have failed to meet the requirements of the Scheme.

The State Review Panel will:

- Conduct interviews to assess applicants no less than three times per calendar year.
- Assess the qualifications of the applicants according to the National Reference Panel classification system.

The current Western Australian State Review Panel is made up of two representatives from each general practice college:

- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM); and
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
6.0 Assessment of Qualifications – National Reference Panel Classification

The National Reference Panel (NRP) on OTD’s has developed a five category classification system, based on postgraduate general practice qualifications and general practice experience, to be applied to OTDs who wish to join the Scheme. Testing of professional eligibility (qualifications, experience, competence and capability) of OTD’s wishing to participate in the Scheme is based on that system.

Category 1

Overseas Trained Doctors who hold any one of these qualifications:

- Fellowship of The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (FRNZCGP);
- Certificates in Family Practice from the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and successful completion of both parts of the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examination;
- Both Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners (MRCGP), United Kingdom and Certificates from the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board (PMETB), United Kingdom.
- Membership of the Irish College of General Practitioners (MICGP).

Overseas Trained Doctors who hold these qualifications are eligible for admission to Fellowship of the RACGP ad eundum gradum.

Category 2

Overseas Trained Doctors who hold any one of these qualifications:

- Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners (MRCGP), United Kingdom;
- Membership of the Faculty of General Practitioners; or Member of the College of Family Practitioners, South Africa by examination (MFGP or the new MCFP);
- The Certificate of the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM), USA;
- The Certificate of the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (JCPTGP), UK;
- Masters of Medicine (Family Medicine) from the National University of Singapore;
- Registration as a Family Physician with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (formerly the South African Medical and Dental Council of South Africa);
- Masters of Family Medicine, South Africa; or
- Masters of Prax Medicine, South Africa.

Overseas Trained Doctors who hold one of these memberships/qualifications are required to undertake the RACGP Fellowship exam and have two years to complete the exam.
Category 3

Category 3 OTDs are those who have general practice training and post graduate qualifications not recognised by the but who have more then five years of full-time general practice experience. OTDs in this category are eligible for award of the FRACGP via the Practice Eligibility Route after a determination by the RACGP of the equivalence of their general practice experience to five years full time of Australian general practice and completion of the RACGP examination or the ACRRM Independent Pathway on assessment of partial or substantial comparability.

Category 4

Category 4 OTDs are those who have no general practice training or postgraduate qualifications, but have more than five years full-time general practice experience in another country.

Category 5

Category 5 OTDs are those who have no general practice training or postgraduate qualifications and less than five years of equivalent full-time general practice experience in another country. OTDs in this category would not be eligible for FRACGP until they have completed five years of equivalent general practice.

Category 5 OTDs are not eligible to join the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme.

7.0 Categories for Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme locations

A system of graded incentives or concessions has been established to categorise locations/positions according to their level of difficulty. The system reduces the OTD’s contract period before being given an unrestricted provider number by up to two years, provided he or she meets all other program requirements including Fellowship and Permanent Residency.

The length of placement on the Scheme is reduced where a participant is located in a concessional location. The time reduction will mean that one year served in the location will count as either one and a half or two years within the Scheme, depending on the category agreed by the Department of Health and Ageing and Department of Health, Western Australia. The maximum reduction in the contract period is two years. The time concession is available only after 12 months have first been served in a Category A or B location and thereafter will accrue at six-monthly intervals following agreement with Rural Health West.

There are three categories applicable to Five Year Scheme locations. The categories will determine the amount of time concession an OTD can earn under the Scheme.

Category A – Exceptionally difficult for General Practitioner recruitment and retention

This category covers locations which experience exceptional difficulties recruiting and retaining General Practitioners.
Every year in this category is to count as two years on the Scheme, with the maximum reduction being from five to three years. A period of twelve months must be served before an Overseas Trained Doctor can qualify for the time concession. The list of specific communities is to be agreed between the Department of Health and Ageing and Department of Health, Western Australia.

**Category B – Very difficult for General Practitioner recruitment and retention**

This category covers specific communities which experience a lot of difficulty recruiting and retaining General Practitioners. Overseas Trained Doctors who work in agreed localities in this category where it is very difficult to recruit and retain General Practitioners are to be credited with 1.5 years on the Scheme for every one year served in such a community. A period of twelve months must be served before an OTD can qualify for the time concession.

**Category C – Difficult for General Practitioner retention and recruitment**

This category covers other locations in RRMA 4-7 and areas within the parameters set by the State or Territory Guidelines which experience difficulty in recruiting and retaining General Practitioners. This is the default category and includes all locations previously approved unless otherwise agreed. The OTD must serve five years on the Scheme with no time concessions. This category may also include locations that are not currently Districts of Workforce Shortage but have a demonstrated requirement for advanced practice skills in the community, for example, obstetrics and anaesthetics.

**8.0 Position Conditions**

OTDs on the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme are required to provide a continuous medical service to their area of practice on a full-time basis. This includes the provision of legitimate on-call and after-hours services.

Temporary Resident OTDs are required to meet the minimum working hours requirements of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship relevant to the visa held.

**9.0 Relocation Concessions**

OTDs on the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme may be allowed to relocate to other approved and available locations within the State. This is provided there is prior consent from Rural Health West and the new location matches the OTD’s skills, personal requirements and family needs. This portability can be utilised in conjunction with the graded incentives system.

This incentive provides for portability in placement where an OTD serves in a difficult location for a limited period, followed by a transfer to an easier location for the balance of the OTDs contract period, whether five years or less. The incentive allows OTD’s recruited to Category A or B locations to move to other rural locations within the Scheme to complete their time commitment according to the above requirements.

Location transfers including periods of up-skilling away from regular practice must first be approved by Rural Health West in order to maintain accurate Medical Board of Western Australia registration, to ensure the new location is classed eligible and for commitments to be recorded.
10.0 Leave Arrangements

OTDs on the Scheme may be eligible for up to three months leave without any penalties. This would cover recreation leave, training leave and special leave that may be required (such as maternity leave). This provision is specifically designed to assist OTDs in remote locations that may be experiencing personal difficulty. It is not envisaged that the full three months will be taken up by most OTDs. These arrangements are at the discretion of, and must have prior approval of Rural Health West.

11.0 Unforseen Leave

OTDs on the Scheme will be eligible for special leave of up to 12 months for unforseen circumstances. Some of these circumstances may include family illness or personal illness.

Members that fail to return to the Scheme or an eligible Scheme location within the 12 month period may be removed from the Scheme. Unforseen leave arrangements and removal from the Scheme will be at the discretion of Rural Health West.

12.0 Educational and Training Support

OTDs on the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme have access to education and support with the aim of attaining FRACGP within two years of commencement on the Scheme. An OTD may lodge an application seeking additional time to pass the FRACGP in extenuating circumstances relating to the OTD's personal situation and/or work location. Such an extension is at the discretion of the State Review Panel.

OTDs on the Scheme are required to actively participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs and External Clinical Teaching (ECT) visits provided by Rural Health West mentors. Failure to do so may result in termination of the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme Contract.

Funding is supplied for the following:

- Assessment of the OTD’s skills to enable the level and nature of support they require to pass the Fellowship. An Independent Learning Plan (ILP) comprising of two parts is required to be completed. The first section is for the OTD to complete and identify strengths and weaknesses. This will subsequently be refined in conjunction with the Rural Health West mentor. Based on the information obtained from the overall ILP, an ongoing learning plan will be developed. The ILP will be Rural Health West's guide to individual learning needs and must be returned with the signed contract before any funds can be utilised.

- Subsidies, where appropriate, and consistent with the ILP will be provided to reduce the cost to the OTD for formal tuition, educational resources and/or exam preparation course costs required in preparation for the Fellowship examination process.

- Arranging a GP mentor for all OTD’s seeking Fellowship.

- Provision of appropriate case management and general support to the OTD and his or her family.
13.0 Termination of the Contract

In the event that an OTD on the Scheme fails to comply with the requirements of the Scheme, the State Review Panel may terminate the OTDs Scheme placement by issuing a notice stating the grounds for termination. The recipient will be advised in writing of the number of days they have been granted to respond to the notice and will be required to state reasons why their participation should not be terminated.

Upon such termination, the Australian Government’s undertaking to provide a reduction in the ten year moratorium will lapse.

14.0 Appeals and Disputes

Applicants who have been denied acceptance onto the Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Recruitment Scheme, or OTDs already on the Scheme who have any disputes over the administration of the guidelines or termination may appeal to the Rural Health West, stating their grounds for appeal. Appeals should be directed to:

The Medical Director
Rural Health West
PO Box 433
Nedlands WA 6909
Tel: (08) 6389 4500
Fax: (08) 6389 4501

Problems and disputes relating to the operation of the Medicare Provider Number restrictions which apply to Overseas Trained Doctors or to the ten year moratorium may be directed to:

The Assistant Director
Workforce Regulation Section
MDP 50
Department of Health and Ageing
GPO Box 9848
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Tel: (02) 6289 5903
Fax: (02) 6289 1352
Email: 5year@health.gov.au

Any appeal in relation to the FRACGP or recognition of qualifications and experience should be directed to:

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
1 Palmerston Crescent
SOUTH MELBOURNE VIC 3205
Tel: 1800 331 626
Fax: (03) 8699 0400
Website: www.racgp.org.au

Matters regarding Medicare Provider Number eligibility should be directed to Medicare Australia, at the following address:

Medicare Australia
PO Box 1001
TUGGERANONG DC ACT 2901
Tel: (02) 6124 6333
Fax: (02) 6124 6100
Website: www.medicareaustralia.gov.au
Matters regarding permanent residency should be directed to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Perth Business Centre
Locked Bag 7
Northbridge WA 6865
Fax: (08) 9415 9288
Website: www.immi.gov.au

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