

Reflections from a long-standing GP Supervisor

Thank you to Dr Greg Hunter for sharing his reflections...

I always have found it fulfilling to host medical students in my practice over the years, commencing in 1981 with an association with UQ, and having been honoured with many students from a number of universities since then. Fresh faces often bring fresh knowledge.

I did not make a considered decision to host medical students in the beginning. I worked with one other GP in a small practice. My GP colleague had arranged for a student from UQ to spend time at our practice in early 1981 but neglected to tell me, and that I would be supervising the student. I arrived one day at work to be introduced to the student who would be with me for the next few weeks, day and night. Students then were billeted with the doctor. This uncomplaining young man was then accommodated in my small rented humpy in the countryside on a mattress on the floor, there not even being a spare bed. He survived the relative deprivations and his presence gave me much enjoyment in showing him the various facets of general practice in a semi-rural location. By the time the next student arrived there was at least a bed to rest upon.

Since those first few weeks it has been so enjoyable to have students with me. They have been invariably keen to find out about General Practice, and have provided a second opinion and someone to discuss various factors in a case. More and more they have been able to demonstrate the latest in modern learning techniques with information available at their fingertips rather than having to return to the medical school library for information.

I recall having one student who was keen to be first on call at the local hospital at night, and the beaming smile next morning when he related his first successful resuscitation of a patient from a cardiac arrest through the previous night without having to call me. Another student was most impressed with how we avoided a speeding fine from the police. We had been at the drug rehabilitation clinic some 15km from the local hospital when a call came to inform me of a woman in labour. We rushed out onto the highway and sped away only to be hauled over by the police just 2km from the hospital as I tried to negotiate busy traffic. A quick explanation was accepted and the police gave us an escort, lights and siren included. The student was only too happy to go out to the police once we were able to perform our duty at the hospital to inform them the baby boy was delivered safely.

When hosting medical students, I find it is very helpful to one's own awareness of medical knowledge. To impart knowledge, it has to be understood well and to explain facts or concepts the details have to be outlined in a precise manner; hence the need to have it firmly understood by oneself. Students will ask questions somewhat different to patients' queries. The student will need an explanation in more depth but also to be pointed to a source of information if my answer is not complete, or lacking. They have kept me on my toes.

General Practice should be presented more to medical students during their course, to enable them to understand the workings of primary health care. The student may not go on to become a GP but the experiences will enable a more informed understanding of the GP's role within the complex array of care available in Australia and to allow a better transition of care of patients between various sectors. General Practice offers doctors an expansive view of people's lives with an ability to contribute to their patients' health and well-being over many years, a relationship which is beneficial to both parties. In this regard I would encourage GP's to open up their practices to incorporate students frequently so learnt knowledge can be imparted well to the next generation of care-givers.

Dr Greg Hunter, Tweed Heads