Medical Workforce Issues
December 2011

Introduction
This paper examines recent trends in the size and composition of New Zealand’s medical workforce, not including nurses and carers. This has significant implications given New Zealand’s growing ageing population. The data presented is derived from multiple sources including the Medical Council of New Zealand’s 2010 Workforce Survey.

Size of Medical Workforce
• The number of registered active doctors in New Zealand is 13,883 as of 31 March 2010.
• This is estimated to be an average of 317 doctors per 100,000 of the population.
• Wairarapa District Health Board has the lowest ratio of doctors to population with 142 doctors per 100,000 of the population, followed by Waitemata (154) and West Coast (156) District Health Boards. Auckland District Health Board has the highest ratio of doctors to population with 543 doctors per 100,000.
• The number of practicing specialists registered in 2010 was 4,262. This is an estimated average 97.6 specialists per 100,000 of the population. In 2007, the OECD average was estimated to be 180 specialists per 100,000.

Demographics
• The medical workforce is gradually getting older. The average age of doctors was 45 years in 2010 compared to 42 years in 2000.
• In 2008, the 45-49 year age group made up 17 percent of the medical workforce compared to 13 percent in 2000. A medical school cap reduction on the number of places in 1982 to 285, that was unchanged until 2004, may have contributed to this age imbalance. Between 2004 and 2011 the number of places rose to 445.
• The age structure of the medical workforce indicates that there will be a significant portion of the medical workforce retiring over the same period of time in the near future.

### Statistics on the medical workforce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of registered active doctors</td>
<td>11,578</td>
<td>12,283</td>
<td>12,643</td>
<td>12,949</td>
<td>13,408</td>
<td>13,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of International Medical Graduates (%)</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of practicing medical specialists</td>
<td>3,451</td>
<td>3,536</td>
<td>3,757</td>
<td>3,903</td>
<td>4,060</td>
<td>4,262</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of medical graduates (registered with the New Zealand Medical Council)</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduates
• In April 2010, the Health Insurance Amendment (New Zealand Overseas Trained Doctors) Act 2009 came into effect in Australia. It removed the 10 year moratorium on billing Medicare for New Zealand-born and trained doctors working in Australia. This removed a disincentive for New Zealand graduates to work in Australia.
• New Zealand relies heavily on international graduates staffing the medical workforce. According to the New Zealand Medical Workforce Survey in 2010, the average proportion of international medical graduates is 41.1% of the workforce, one of the highest in the OECD.
• International doctors are a highly mobile workforce. In 2009 it was estimated on average that only 50.8% of new international medical graduates are retained in New Zealand after one year.
• New Zealand had a higher number of medical graduates per 100,000 of the population in 2009 compared to Canada and the United States (see graph below). New Zealand remained behind Australia and the United Kingdom’s graduate numbers as theirs increased over 2004-2007.
Number of medical graduates per 100,000 of the population in selected OECD countries

Recent policy initiatives
- A ministerial taskforce recommended in 2009 the need for a single agency responsible for the entire health and disability services workforce. Health Workforce New Zealand (HWNZ) was established the same year to coordinate the planning of New Zealand’s health workforce.
- HWNZ is working with the University of Otago and the University of Auckland to develop multidisciplinary Rural Immersion Health Training Placement programmes (an expansion of a previous programme) to encourage students to enter the rural medical workforce.
- A voluntary bonding scheme for medical, midwifery and nursing graduates was announced in 2009. This provides incentive payments for up to five years to assist with the student loans of graduates who work in hard-to-staff locations.
- HWNZ in conjunction with Auckland District Health Board are offering a 12 week programme to assist International Medical Graduates (who are residents in New Zealand) prepare for the Medical Council of New Zealand Registration Examination (NZREX).

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