



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEES

Health and Ageing Committee

Report

SPEECH

Monday, 19 March 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Irons, Steve, MP

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Mr IRONS (Swan) (10:20): As Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing it is my pleasure to present, along with the committee chairman, the member for Hindmarsh, the results of the many months of hard work the committee has undertaken.

As the committee chairman said in his speech, Australia has one of the best healthcare systems in the world. Together with a high standard of living, our country presents an attractive option for foreign trained doctors and their families. In coming to Australia many international medical graduates, IMGs, begin by working in a regional, rural or remote area. Undoubtedly, IMGs contribute significantly to meeting the healthcare needs of these communities. In doing so, they often become integral to the communities they serve.

At the heart of this inquiry is the shortage of doctors in Australia and the processes that inhibit the ability of Australia to recruit overseas trained doctors. At a local level we have been doing all we can to address this shortage through the campaign for a new medical school at Curtin University, Bentley, in my electorate of Swan. However, due to this shortage there has been a growing demand for overseas trained doctors across Australia and particularly in rural communities to fill medical shortages. Australia has developed a reliance on overseas trained and qualified medical practitioners to fill shortages in supply in recent years. Today an estimated 39 per cent of registered medical practitioners in Australia are international medical graduates. While many overseas trained doctors have been welcomed by communities in need there have been process related problems. This is what this inquiry and its 45 recommendations seek to address. I note the article in today's *Australian* suggesting the inquiry is about fast-tracking overseas doctors and I would say that fast-tracking doctors from overseas was not the intention of this inquiry. It is about improving process. The high representation of overseas trained doctors in our medical system makes it important the government ensures that proper registration and support processes are in place. The report tabled this morning focuses on the importance of these processes. The challenge is to establish a system which enables suitably qualified and experienced medical practitioners to work in Australia, while also protecting the health and wellbeing of the Australian public. The work of this committee has been to recommend improvements to this process and to make sure overseas trained doctors meet the professional standards needed to practise medicine in Australia.

Health workforce planning is crucial if governments are to implement workforce policies which ensure that the supply and distribution of medical practitioners is appropriate to meet community healthcare needs. The report tabled in the House today provides 45 recommendations that: explore ways overseas trained doctors can better understand colleges' assessment processes and appeal mechanisms; explore ways to improve community understanding of this process; provide suggestions to improve support programs available through the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, professional organisations and colleges; and suggest ways to remove impediments and provide pathways for overseas trained doctors to achieve full Australian qualification, particularly in regional areas, without lowering standards.

The tabled report is 291 pages. We received over 200 submissions. Of the 216 submissions, 109 were from IMGs, 91 from organisations with involvement in accreditation, registration or recruitment of IMGs, and the remaining 16 were from other interested parties, including academics, co-workers, community members and patients. The committee also conducted an extensive program of public hearings, visiting in every state and territory in Australia and hearing evidence directly from 145 witnesses during 22 public hearings in 12 different cities.

Along with my chairman, I would like to thank the people from the committee and particularly the secretariat, who supported the inquiry all through this process. I would like to particularly thank the opposition whip, the member for Leichardt, for his contributions and his energy in getting this inquiry underway. I would also like to thank, along with the committee chairman, all the people who came and gave evidence at the committee hearings, and particularly those who presented their thoughts in private and in public on the processes in this area that

needed to be fixed. In closing, I again thank the secretariat, who did an enormous job in compiling this report and putting it together.

The SPEAKER: Does the member for Hindmarsh wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr GEORGANAS: I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 39(d), the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.