Letters

How receptive are patients to medical students in Australian hospitals? A cross-sectional survey of a public and a private hospital

To the Editor: Clinical training opportunities are a vital component of medical student education.[1] The yearly intake of medical students into Australian universities has more than doubled since 2000.[2] There is a need for increased clinical placements to accommodate the increasing student numbers. One possible solution is to extend clinical training in "non-traditional" settings, including in private hospitals.[3,4] It is important to know whether private hospital patients are receptive to medical students, as this will influence the success of this initiative.

We conducted a cross-sectional survey of patients from a private hospital (Cabrini Hospital Malvern) and a public hospital (The Alfred) in

Patient willingness to allow a medical student to participate in their interview, examination and selected procedures at a private hospital* and a public hospital†

Patient responses	Aspect of clinical care									
	Interview		Examination		Electrocardiogram		Venepuncture		Digital rectal exam‡	
	Private (*n* = 146)	Public (*n* = 141)	Private (*n* = 146)	Public§ (*n* = 140)	Private (*n* = 141)	Public§ (*n* = 136)	Private (*n* = 139)	Public (*n* = 137)	Private (*n* = 137)	Public (*n* = 138)
Would allow student to:										
Perform with or without supervision	77%	64%	50%	51%	54%	46%	40%	33%	na	na
Perform with supervision	13%	28%	34%	39%	33%	41%	45%	44%	44%	39%
Observe	9%	6%	12%	6%	9%	10%	14%	19%	34%	46%
Would not allow student to be present	1%	2%	4%	3%	4%	2%	1%	4%	22%	15%
P	0.02¶		0.32		0.48		0.38		0.10	

* Private hospital was Cabrini Hospital Malvern, Melbourne. † Public hospital was The Alfred, Melbourne. ‡ No option was listed for medical students to perform a digital rectal examination without supervision, as this does not occur in practice. § Numbers do not total 100% due to rounding. ¶ Significant at $P < 0.05$. na = not applicable. ◆

Melbourne to investigate whether private hospital patients are as willing as public hospital patients to allow medical students to participate in their care, and whether they have similar attitudes to student participation. Between June and August 2011, we recruited patients admitted to each hospital's general medical unit who were at least 18 years of age, spoke English and were capable of completing a self-administered multiple-choice questionnaire.

Three hundred and sixty patients were eligible to participate (162 private and 198 public). The participation rate was significantly higher at the private hospital than at the public hospital (90.1% v 71.7%, $P < 0.01$). Patients at the private hospital were more willing than patients at the public hospital to allow a medical student to take their history unsupervised (76.7% v 63.8%, $P = 0.01$). Apart from those rates, patient willingness did not differ between hospitals for physical examination or procedures (Box).

We assessed patient attitudes to medical students with a series of 10 positively worded and 10 negatively worded attitude statements. Overall, attitudes were similar between hospitals, with responses differing between hospitals for only four of the 20 statements. Notably, for each of these four statements, private hospital patients were more likely to endorse the favourably worded statement about student participation in their care.

Our study found no evidence that patients in a private hospital were less receptive to medical students participating in their care than patients in a public hospital. Patient receptiveness is only one consideration, but this study supports the placement of medical students in private hospitals.

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1 Australian Medical Council. Assessment and accreditation of medical schools: standards and procedures, 2011. Canberra: AMC; 2010. http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Accreditation.aspx (accessed Mar 2012).

2 Medical Training Review Panel. Medical Training Review Panel, fourteenth report. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing; 2011. http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/work-pubs-mtrp-14 (accessed Mar 2012).

3 Crotty BJ. More students and less patients: the squeeze on medical teaching resources [editorial]. *Med J Aust* 2005; 183: 444-445.

4 Sen Gupta T, Hays RB, Woolley TS, et al. Challenges with maintaining clinical teaching capacity in regional hospitals [letter]. *Med J Aust* 2011; 195: 584-585. ❑