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INCENTIVES NEEDED TO MAKE GENERAL PRACTICE ATTRACTIVE

General practice needs to become a more attractive career choice for young doctors if Australia is to meet the growing nation-wide demand for GPs, according to a systematic review that examined options for attracting doctors into the specialty.

While general practice is one of the specialties hardest hit by the national doctor shortage, GPs will be in greater demand as the burden of chronic disease and emphasis on community preventative medicine grows.

Research led by Associate Professor Jill Thistlethwaite, funded by the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute, based at The Australian National University showed medical students and doctors are influenced by a number of factors when making a career choice, including work/life balance, experiences during training and at medical school, and their personality.

But she says making general practice flexible in training and working hours would be a big draw card for the new generation of doctors.

"In the past solo GPs and older doctors have been willing to work long hours and set up a business, but these days young doctors want more opportunity to spend time with their families," Professor Thistlethwaite said.

Incentives are needed to retain women in the workforce like funding maternity leave or developing salaried general practice positions which give job security and regular remuneration, rather than leaving GPs reliant on Medicare items for payment, her research suggests.

"There should be a priority put on developing more prevocational general practice placements for junior doctors, so they can experience what general practice offers," she said.

Encouraging nurses into general practice by providing greater autonomy through Medicare payment structure changes, a greater emphasis on teamwork and more effective time in general practice for medical students are other recommendations of the research.

Professor Nicholas Glasgow, APHCRI Foundation Director, said Professor Thistlethwaite's work was one of nine projects funded by the Institute to examine how to rectify the workforce shortage in primary health care.

"This is a serious issue that Australia needs to address. There have been government initiatives to improve medical school numbers and that will help eventually, but with an emphasis on preventative and community medicine in dealing with chronic illness GP numbers need to grow, and we need to know how to attract and retain people in the field," he said.

For information on Professor Thistlethwaite's research *Attracting health professionals into primary health care: strategies for recruitment* and others examining general practice nursing, mental health care and rural and remote health workforce issues see: <http://www.anu.edu.au/aphcri/Domain/Workforce/index.php>

ANU MEDIA OFFICE: Jane O'Dwyer
T: (02) 6125 5001
M: 0416 249 231

Simon Couper
T: (02) 6125 4171
M: 0416 249 241

Martyn Pearce
T: (02) 6125 5575
M: 0416 249 245

Alice Nixon
T: (02) 6125 6125