

23/08/2021

Submission to Parliament regarding GP Shortage on the Central Coast NSW

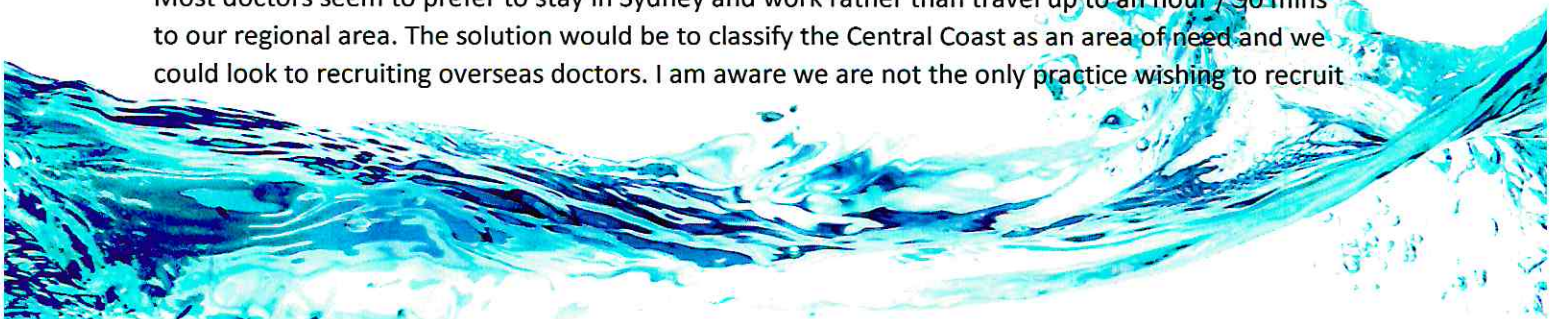
I am writing on behalf of the Central Coast Skin Cancer Clinic to submit our concerns regarding the inability to recruit GPs for over the past 18 months. We are a group of specialist General Practitioners and staff who manage skin cancer services: diagnosis, management and surgery. This practice has existed on the Central Coast for more than 22 years with an excellent purpose-built facility of 6 consulting rooms and three operating theatres to manage skin cancer removal and associated surgical reconstructive techniques. Our patients come from all over the Central Coast and from outlying regional areas and Sydney suburbs. We also receive referrals from local GPs who do not have the experience to perform reconstructive surgery which may be more affordable performed at our clinic by our GPs rather than referred to local plastic surgeons or join extensive waiting lists within the public hospital for general surgery or plastics surgery. Note 50% of our patients are pensioners so the private hospital is considered unaffordable for these patients.

Recently we have had original owners retire and one doctor from Sydney leave at the beginning of the COVID outbreak, since that time we have had difficulty recruiting replacements, despite spending significant investment in advertising extensively in multiple forms of media and usually general practice newsletters journals, online advertising platforms INDEED, for the past 18 months – all have been unsuccessful in finding **any** applicants. We additionally have resorted to using 2 private recruiting companies and still have been unsuccessful in finding candidates as we are not an “area of need” as we are located in East Gosford, NSW. Candidates are found but they are not suitable as we are in the 2250 Post code and therefore deemed not an area of need by the Government.

Our practice currently performs nearly 17000 consultations per year. Our patient waiting lists extend beyond 2 months in Summer, and given the recent closure of 1 of the 2 dermatology practices servicing the Central Coast, I anticipate our patient load with further increase. We performed 287 Melanoma cancer surgeries last financial year, and 2108 non-melanoma cancer surgeries. The issue in relation to GP shortage is that we have an aging GP population and have difficulty replacing them once they retire. The average age of the current 8 doctors in our practice is 59 with 2 doctors in their 70s planning retirement within the next 6 months and 2 doctors in their 60s also discussing retirement plans. Given the inability to recruit GPs this is quite distressing.

Should we not be able to recruit general practitioners to fill the 2 FTE we are currently advertising, and should further doctors retire, it may not be feasible to continue, and we will close as the practice will become unprofitable. (Note: as we are a specialist clinic, we do not attract the NIPs and co-payment general practice normally attracts with their accreditation process). If our practice closes this would mean the patients currently active in our database, approximately 45,000 active patients, will need to see their local doctors instead for this cancer service. This further increases the load on the local doctors in the region to provide acute care and will increase the waiting times for Central Coast people to find an appointment with their GP. Last month we performed 42 Melanoma surgeries and 173 non-melanoma cancer surgeries, should we close, this burden would be significantly placed on our already struggling public hospital to manage these patients.

Most doctors seem to prefer to stay in Sydney and work rather than travel up to an hour / 90 mins to our regional area. The solution would be to classify the Central Coast as an area of need and we could look to recruiting overseas doctors. I am aware we are not the only practice wishing to recruit





GPs. Doctors in Wamberal and East Gosford are also looking for staff to join their practice as doctors retire and practices wish to cater for their increasing populations.

Thank you for reviewing the need to change the recruitment of doctors on the Central Coast.

Jillian Power

Practice Manager

