

Executive Summary: The North American Medical Students' Association (NAMSA) is a student-run organisation at the University of Sydney. We have canvassed medical students about their concerns over international student welfare. Two issues were paramount as concerns. They are, in order of importance:

Internship availability for graduates of University of Sydney Graduate Medical Program – as of August 12, 2009, 20% of international students who have applied to the Institute of Medical Education and Training (IMET) for internship in NSW have not received a spot.

Travel concessions – NSW and Victoria are the only two states that do not provide travel concessions to international students forcing them to pay double the price of a domestic student on trains, buses and ferries.

We intend to outline NAMSA's mandate, illustrate our concerns as they relate to the 'Inquiry into Welfare of International Students' and outline our recommendations for change.

Our Mandate: NAMSA was founded in 2000 by North American medical students. We act as a resource to our 160 lifetime members. Our aim is to support North American students studying medicine at the University of Sydney, whether they intend to return to their home country or choose to stay in Australia. In addition to holding several educational seminars throughout the year, NAMSA has created an 'International Internship Committee' to specifically address the plight of international students who wish to train in Australia.

Our Concerns:

Internship: Re: (a) the roles and responsibilities of education providers, migration and education agents, state and federal governments, and relevant departments and embassies, in ensuring the quality and adequacy in information, advice, service delivery and support, with particular reference to:

Employment rights and protections from exploitation

As of July 20, 2009, no international student in NSW was offered an internship position as IMET had offered 672 internships to domestic students for 670 actual spots. The >100 international students received an email from IMET that evening informing them they would not receive an offer for internship in the first round and would have to wait until August 5, 2009. As of August 5, 2009, 80% of the remaining international students were offered a spot leaving 20% still waiting. The issues are:

Internship is an integral part of medical training. Without it, one cannot practice as a doctor rendering their education useless in Australia.

A large proportion of international students wish to stay and practice in Australia.

According to IMET's statistics presented at an information night July 30, 2009, 92% of international students offered internship spots accept.

This is problem of poor foresight, poor organisation and underfunding. NSW Health was only able to offer 670 internship spots due to funding constraints. With 672 domestic applicants for NSW internships, NSW is graduating and will be graduating (with the addition of University of Wollongong and University of Notre Dame), too many domestic students to train. According to the aforementioned IMET information meeting, NSW Health would like 800 interns but there is not enough state funding to allow that number. It is unacceptable that NSW universities are accepting more students, both domestic and international, than the state can train.

International students contribute significantly to the Australian economy and are being discriminated against. The average tuition of an international medical student at the University of Sydney is \$250,000 over 4 years and is rising yearly. International students have been courted and accepted in growing numbers pouring millions of dollars into NSW and yet they are seen as second class competing for internships declined by domestic students.

Some select comments from international students at University of Sydney:

“Australia has made a big push to expand the number of international students they educate but it doesn’t seem that they are willing to take on the responsibilities that come with accepting our substantial student fees.” – Blaise Wardle, Year 1.

“... is it apparent to you whether or not the faculty of medicine has considered (or illustrated perception of the fact) that if the current trend continues they will likely be left without the fees of 200 med students @ \$50K/yr (i.e. some 10 million dollars in annual funds)? Clearly this would be from next year’s intake cohort as I don’t see one potential international student deciding to accept an offer from USyd in said situation.” – Michael Ginsburg, Year 3.

“There is no doubt that forcing international students to pay increasingly higher tuition fees and removing our ability to compete on an equal basis for internship is discriminatory....To come to Australia, in hopes of becoming a doctor here, to later find out you are no longer able to gain an internship position is leading to an increased amount of stress on all international medical students; we are left with having an essential part of our education take away and therefore are unable to become a doctor.” – Robert Flook, Year 1

Some select comments of support from domestic students at University of Sydney:

“By not informing prospective students by explicitly stating that this progression may be difficult for International graduates is a misrepresentation tantamount to fraud.” – Stephen Wood, Year 2

“I believe that when we accept the fees that overseas students pay, we also accept responsibility for allowing them to complete their training.” – Andy Carter, Year 1

“I strongly believe that [international students] should be given much more support regarding placements post graduation and I strongly disagree with the way they are being treated.” – Sebastian Brown, Year 1

“I cannot find sense in offering places to teach medicine as best we can to students for whom we will then refuse them the opportunity to serve our own community as a locally trained medical professional.” – Bernard Higgins, Year 1

“Further, in a struggling health system with a shortage in doctors (& other health professionals) I believe it is irresponsible not to increase the number of available intern places to re-establish an acceptable availability & quality of medical service to the people of Australia.” – James Coocan, Year 1

Travel Concessions: Re: (a) the roles and responsibilities of education providers, migration and education agents, state and federal governments, and relevant departments and embassies, in ensuring the quality and adequacy in information, advice, service delivery and support, with particular reference to:

(v) adequate international supports and advocacy

Since 1989, international students in NSW have been made to pay double in public

transport costs relative to their domestic colleagues since they are deemed ineligible for travel concessions. SUPRA (Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association) was part of the 2006 case against the NSW Minister for Transport Services, STA, RTA and Railcorp for their discriminatory treatment of international students. This case was won citing breach of the Anti Discrimination Act of 1977, however NSW law was quickly amended to allow continuation of this discrimination against international students. The new amendment to the Transport Administration Amendment (Travel Concession) Bill 2006 denies international students on the grounds that the terms of their student visa requires them to accept all living costs associated with living in Australia, including transport. Clearly, this is another example of discrimination and inadequate international supports.

Our Recommendations:

Ensure internship positions for all international medical students currently studying in Australia. This will require co-operation at all levels of government, as well as the universities.

Provide NSW State Government with funds to provide all 800 internship positions that NSW Health has requested.

Advise universities that they are not to accept more international medical students if the state cannot offer them internship, or ensure that prospective students are adequately warned of their inability to complete their training here.

Provide travel concessions to all international students.