

2 July 2009

Mr John Carter,
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter

Submission to the Inquiry into Effects of Climate Change on Training and Employment Needs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to this inquiry on behalf of the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine (AFPHM), part of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. The Inquiry was brought to the attention of the Faculty on Friday evening 26 June, the closing date for submissions, and we are grateful that the office of the Committee has agreed to accept this late submission.

This submission by the AFPHM will address both Terms of Reference established for the committee which will report on *'developing Australia's capacity in the area of climate change'*.

a. The ability of universities and other research and training institutions to meet current and future demand for climate change professionals

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) is responsible for the postgraduate vocational education of medical graduates preparing for specialist physician practice and for the continuing professional development of its Fellows. The RACP is a large organization with 9191 Fellows and 4703 Trainees. Public health medicine is the branch of medical practice concerned with the health and care of populations, including the influence of the environment on their health. The promotion of health and the prevention of disease and illness, the assessment of the health needs of communities and the provision of services at a population level are some of the ways that public health medicine contributes to the health of the Australian population. There are approximately 600 Australian AFPHM Fellows and 67 trainees are currently enrolled in the Advanced Training Program for specialist practice in public health medicine.

Public health medicine specialists in particular have been at the forefront of the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – an international multi-professional group articulating the potential threat that climate change poses the Earth. However to date it has been the concerned few driving forward this agenda. As Professor Tony McMichael, an eminent Australian public health physician, states in the Commonwealth Health Ministers' Update 2009 *'human-induced climate change ...is real, demonstrably underway and apparently accelerating'*. (1)

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians
Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine
145 Macquarie Street SYDNEY NSW 2000 AUSTRALIA
Tel: +61 2 9256 5474 Fax: +61 2 9252 3526
Email: afphm@racp.edu.au

Public health physicians will help mitigate the effects of climate change by:

- Helping to define the human health consequences and respond to these (1) and;
- Influencing health care systems to reduce their carbon foot print (2).

Helping to define the human health consequences of climate change and responding to these

While the public health medicine workforce must respond to the challenges of climate change in order to protect, promote and maintain population health, experience has demonstrated that it is often difficult to recruit public health medical specialists to fill positions because there are few people with this qualification. In addition many currently active members of this workforce are rapidly approaching retirement. A coordinated approach to the expansion of numbers of this small specialist group is required.

McMichael (1) identifies the need for expanded professional training in order to be able to mount an appropriate response. From the AFPHM perspective funded training positions across Australia would allow a systematic and strategic response to climate change by gradually expanding the number of public health medicine specialists and enabling trainees to rotate through health settings where they can assist with:

- Establishing epidemiological surveillance systems that allow the impacts of climate change to be measured and contribute to national health risk assessment
- The development and evaluation of public health strategies on specific health impacts of climate change including: heat waves; floods and coastal inundation risks; drought and bushfires; infectious diseases in particular the control of the expansion of arboviral diseases.
- The clinical policy elements of public health risk management systems including disaster planning and mass gatherings.
- Applying this learning in both urban and rural settings
- Working with Aboriginal people to protect their health and their environments
- Complex high level intersectoral working to achieve organizational change
- The development of training modules for other physician groups
- Working with colleagues overseas to facilitate a global response.

(1) Commonwealth Secretariat 2009, *Climate Change and Human Health* chapter 1
Commonwealth Health Ministers' Update 2009 ISBN 978-1-84859-043-4 Pro-Book
Publishing

(2) World Health Organisation and Healthcare Without Harm '*Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Planet, Healthy People Addressing climate change in health care settings*' Discussion Draft 2009

Influencing health care systems to reduce their carbon foot print

The recently launched 2009 Carbon Reduction Strategy for England produced by the newly formed NHS Sustainable Development Unit clearly describes the substantial carbon footprint of the health sector. (3, 4) Promoting sustainable development and reducing carbon emissions of the Australian health sector will be an important contribution to mitigating climate change. This requires a rethink not only in the way we build and maintain the health infrastructure but also in the way we deliver treatment. This will only be possible through the re-orientation of health services which Pencheon (5) has argued is congruent with improving health care services. Public health physicians and other physician groups will need to help drive this transformational change of the health sector and consequently there is a need to increase their knowledge and competencies to be able to achieve this.

b. measures to assist understanding of climate change in the Asia-Pacific region, including provision of training and skills assistance.

Australian physicians, in particular public health physicians, are already assisting with understanding climate change health impacts and vulnerability in several low-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Initial work has been funded by the World Health Organization and there is a pressing need for additional financial support focused on training and skills assistance. (6) Other colleagues are working to map the overall capacity to deliver health care that currently exists within the health sector in these countries. (7)

The health sector must have the capacity to contribute and respond to climate change. The training and continuing professional development offered through the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine seeks to contribute to this capacity through developing medical graduates who are competent to work with physician colleagues and intersectorally to affect societal change.

Consequently we recommend that for the health sector to respond effectively to climate change, there is a pressing need to expand the capacity of public health physicians to contribute by:

- increasing the overall numbers of this small specialist group
- clearly defining the competencies required to contribute in this emerging area of practice and ensuring that public health medicine specialists attain these
- allow expansion of the group specializing in this area so that there is adequate capacity to contribute to leadership in developments.

(3) Sustainable Development Unit *Saving Carbon, Improving Health: NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy for England*. Cambridge: NHS Sustainable Development Unit, 2009

(4) Sustainable Development Commission and Stockholm Environment Institute. *NHS England Carbon Emissions; Carbon footprint study, 2008*. London: Sustainable Development Unit, 2008

(5) Pencheon D., Rissel C. and Hadfield G. *Health sector leadership in mitigating climate change* Redfern Oration, Physicians Week 2009, paper in press with the Medical Journal of Australia.

(6) <http://www.who.int/tdr/svc/search?q=thematic+reference+group>

(7) Mapping Human Resources for Health Profiles from 15 Pacific Island Countries. Report to the Pacific Human Resources for Health Alliance from the Human Resources for Health Knowledge Hub June 2009

<http://www.sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/SPHCMWeb.nsf/page/HRHHub>



For any issues arising from this submission please contact Dr Lynne Madden, Associate Director
Public Health Medicine Training and Development:

lynne.madden@racp.edu.au

mobile 0429 982 889.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours Sincerely

Professor George Rubin
President
Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine