



Doctors for doctors

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2023 is well and truly here. More than 400 new medical students have commenced the next phase of their academic journey towards the MD or MBBS, and a similar number have commenced their internship. Their orientation would have featured presentations on the importance of managing their health and wellbeing during the next year, and support pathways when they find themselves in difficulty. And they all will have heard about the importance of having a relationship with a GP as an independent source of expertise and counsel.

Some may have an established relationship with a GP – and already benefit from their knowledge, experience and referral networks. Others may be new to the State; or new to arranging their own healthcare; or having to seek out their own GP due to working hours that aren't congruent with their existing doctor's availability.

So, this is the time of year where we, at DHASWA, are very keen to strengthen our list of doctors for doctors. Our website, dhaswa.org.au, has a searchable database of GPs, psychiatrists and psychologists who may take on a few new doctor-patients each year. These doctors report that doctor and medical student patients are among the most rewarding to work with – health literate with more than a basic knowledge of self-care; discerning when scrutinising lay messages; often very aware of mental health issues; and often financially able to support private care.

It is true that doctors and medical students may have barriers to undertaking healthy behaviours and seeking help. Work commitments, confidentiality concerns, self-stigma, the ability to treat themselves and, for some, a tendency to minimise symptoms if function is preserved.

This means it's critical that a doctor or medical student who does ask for help can find a doctor who is well suited to them, and also be able to access them rapidly.

Those doctors on our DHASWA list, and others who independently see doctor and medical student patients, know that caring for these patients is nearly (but not quite) the same as for patients of other backgrounds.

Doctors and medical students may have many barriers to undertaking healthy behaviours and seeking help. So it's critical that they are able to find and rapidly access a doctor who is well suited to them, when they do ask for help.

We follow our existing diagnostic reasoning, conducting the clinical aspects of the consultation in a similar pattern to our usual methods. There are additional operational and professional considerations. For example, how to approach billing? How to maintain boundaries? How to facilitate rapid access in times of distress? How to approach shared decision-making when the clinical issue is within that doctor's specialty? How to recognise impairment and interpret the related regulatory frameworks? These challenges can largely be anticipated, and part of DHASWA's remit is to provide training on these issues.

In 2023, we look forward to hosting a full-day workshop on working with doctor-patients, and collaborating with the RACGP and RANZCP on additional real-time and online activities. Nationally, the drs4drs free online learning modules provide an excellent introduction to the principles of the doctor–doctor consultation.

If you are open to seeing doctor and medical student patients, or already see them outside of the DHASWA network, please consider joining our DHASWA list of doctors for doctors. Help us turn the good intentions of the 2023 new starters into reality – where they have a trusted GP who knows them when they are well, and who can move to support them when they are in difficulty. Contact manager@dhaswa.com.au for further information. ■