

Excellence in Training & Education for Resident Medical Officers in the New Zealand Health System

Introduction

Training and education are career-long professional obligations for all doctors, including Resident Medical Officers (RMOs), also known as Resident Doctors. This includes all RMOs whether or not they are in formal specialist or prevocational training programs, and includes clinical specialties and non-patient facing specialties such as public health, or medical administration.

As the largest provider of health services and medical training in Aotearoa New Zealand, Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora has a strategic and operational commitment to excellence in training and education for Resident Medical Officers (RMOs). This applies to hospitals, community services and other health organisations we fund where RMOs work and train.

High quality training and education for RMOs is essential to support high-quality health care, fostering professional development, and sustaining our current and future medical workforce. RMOs are doctors working and training to become specialists. They have a critical role in hospitals, community health settings, public health, and across the health system by delivering services whilst undertaking further education and specialist training.

RMO training and education must be comprehensive, well-structured, and sufficiently resourced to produce competent, adaptable, culturally safe and compassionate medical professionals. Recognising our diverse hospitals and community health services, equitable resourcing across our training sites is required to deliver equitable training across the country. This means some training sites will require more resourcing relative to others to achieve equitable training outcomes. In addition, we recognise that training opportunities exist in other healthcare providers, such as private surgical facilities, general practices, laboratories, hospices, NGO's, iwi providers and public health organisations and government agencies that Health NZ contracts for health services.

Excellence in training and education involves a combination of diverse clinical and work-based experiences, structured mentorship, continuous learning, and a supportive work environment. Alongside formal training and education programmes, the apprenticeship model of learning and experience remains a fundamental part of developing medical expertise.

Alignment with Te Mauri o Rongo is a critical and important requirement to ensure that we are in line with the values, principles and behaviours that Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora is committed to. By aligning with Te Mauri o Rongo and demonstrating the behaviours at all levels we will see better results for RMOs in training, and SMOs now and in the future, alongside other health professionals and the care we provide our communities.

Developing Competence and Hands-On Experience

High-quality RMO training must provide sufficient hands-on experience, as RMOs continuously learn on the job. RMOs should be exposed to a wide range of medical conditions, procedural skills, patient interactions and clinical / healthcare settings, under the supervision of more experienced clinicians, and alongside peers.

This exposure ensures that RMOs develop their medical expertise, patient engagement, diagnostic accuracy, decision-making skills and technical proficiencies. Through quality training and education, RMOs should develop their professionalism in communication, research, quality improvement, ethics, and culturally safe practise.

Key elements of clinical excellence in RMO training include:

- Supervised autonomy: RMOs should have increasing responsibility in patient care and health services while being appropriately supervised and supported by more experienced RMO peers and Senior Medical Officers (SMOs). This allows them to develop confidence and competence in a controlled environment. To support this, we need to have SMO delivered content in person and online, skilled and accessible supervisors and mentors, agreed minimum standards across the motu, support and capability building at key transition times such as Trainee Intern to House Officer to Registrar to SMO.
- Clinical collaboration: Medical practice occurs in the context of multi-disciplinary teams. Training should encourage teamwork with nurses, allied scientific and technical health professionals, and other specialists and services to enhance communication and holistic patient care. A critical element to excellence in training is partnership with RMOs in training programme design, governance and development.
- Access to varied medical settings: Providing RMOs in clinical specialties with comprehensive exposure to clinical practice is an integral component of their training. RMOs should have the opportunity to rotate through different specialties and healthcare settings which progress their training goals and career progression. This includes community settings, rural and urban hospitals, theatre and procedural time, specialist and complex care to develop breadth and depth of knowledge, and well-rounded skills. Different specialties, including public health, community-based and non-patient facing specialties also provide important experiences.
- Quality supervision: Ensuring sufficient resources, training and support are available to Supervisors is essential, recognising the many competing responsibilities that senior medical officers carry. Sufficient time and administrative support are needed for SMOs to be effective clinical supervisors and mentors. RMOs should be given timely and constructive feedback as well as the opportunity and support to improve where deficiencies are identified. SMOs in supervision roles should have protected, resourced time to perform these supervision duties.
- Effective support: RMOs should have effective support from the organisation nationally, regionally, and locally. This includes:
 - Access to cultural safety training and resources and;
 - Culturally safe training environments
 - Up to date run descriptions
 - Protected educational time
 - Access to study courses, materials and study leave in line with employment agreements
 - Sufficient staffing to enable equitable access to training opportunities
 - Effective IT support
 - Empathic rostering at key times
 - Certainty, support and access to rotations which support training progression, with sufficient flexibility to enable work life balance
 - Transparent and equitable pathways into specialist training, leadership and research roles and other advanced practice areas
 - Medical Education and Training Units (METU) and RMO units with sufficient resourcing
 - Access to sufficient annual leave and other supports (pastoral care, EAP, escalation pathways) to prevent burnout & promote wellbeing

As a single national organisation, Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora is the largest medical training provider in Aotearoa New Zealand, with 21 main hospital sites across the country, multiple community hospitals and providers, and public health and medical administration services. In addition Health NZ is a significant funder of primary care

and other health organisations where doctors work and train. As a single organisation, we are able to reduce unwanted variations in training experiences, while sharing positive innovations and practices and ensuring alignment of training resources.

We are committed to strong training pathways and pipelines. We train a diverse workforce which reflects the communities we serve, in support of equity of health outcomes. This includes training pathways and support for RMOs who identify as Māori, Pasifika and whaikaha (disabled) and those from and serving in rural communities.

Commitment to Continuous Learning, Innovation and Cultural Safety

Excellence in training extends beyond clinical skills and health system leadership. Medicine evolves rapidly, and RMOs must be equipped with skills in critical thinking, evidence-based medicine, research, new models of care, emerging technologies, and practising in a culturally safe way. This includes:

- Ongoing professional development: Participation in workshops, conferences, and online learning modules must be supported and protected to ensure RMOs stay updated with medical advancements.
- Simulation-based training: Using medical simulations for procedures and emergency situations enhances practical skills and human factors in a controlled environment.
- Research and quality improvement: Encouraging RMOs to engage in clinical research fosters critical thinking and contributes to the advancement of healthcare practices.
- Delivering culturally safe care to patients, whānau and communities as a core competency.
- Digital literacy and use of digital tools, including Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Key Stakeholders to support an excellence in training environment

As the largest provider of RMO education and training, Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora will engage with key stakeholders, and acknowledges the importance of RMOs in the governance, design and delivery of training.

Our stakeholders include the Medical Council of New Zealand, who set education accreditation standards for post-graduate years 1 and 2 (pre-vocational training), and the Medical Colleges, who set standards and accredit training sites (hospitals, general practices and other providers) for vocational training programmes. Our training and education stakeholders include:

Primary Stakeholders

- RMOs
- Unions (RMO and SMO)
- Clinical supervisors, Prevocational educational supervisors, Directors of Clinical Training, Directors of basic training, Mentors
- Individual Colleges and The Council of Medical Colleges
- Medical Council of New Zealand

Secondary Stakeholders

- RMO Units, METUs, Service Clinical Leadership, operational managers, professional leadership, including Chief Medical Officers
- Ministry of Health
- Australian Medical Council
- Patients, whānau and communities
- Medical Associations (e.g. Te ORA, Pasifika Medical Association)
- Private healthcare providers where training may take place

Conclusion

Excellence in training and education for RMOs in Aotearoa/New Zealand is achieved through a combination of hands-on clinical and non-clinical work-based experience, structured mentorship and supervision, and continuous professional development - all within a supportive healthcare system.

Investing in high-quality training not only benefits individual RMOs but also strengthens the entire health system by ensuring that future medical professionals are skilled, resilient, and equipped to provide outstanding patient care and the lead the health system in the future.

Prioritising these elements will help maintain New Zealand's reputation for delivering world-class healthcare and producing exceptional doctors.