
technical assistants in rural and remote areas, including in Indigenous communities, has also been raised in the Commission's early consultations.

Issues arising from a changing role for the public and private hospital sectors

An increasing proportion of acute hospital care in Australia is being provided in the private system. A vibrant private sector has many benefits — for example, providing wider choice of facilities and earlier access to new technologies and treatments, and helping to address waiting lists in the public hospital system resulting from shortages of beds or restricted theatre time.

However, it also gives rise to some access and equity issues. In particular, it is seen by some as disadvantaging those who cannot afford private health cover.

Also, greater provision of acute care within the private hospital system is reducing the time that specialist practitioners can devote to clinical training within the public hospital system. So far, debate about who should pay for training and issues of indemnity cover have impeded efforts to increase the *training* role of the private hospital system in this area. (The recent agreement between Queensland Health and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons to train specialists in some of the State's private hospitals is a notable exception.) To the extent that these issues remain unresolved, they could constrain the future availability of specialists. Indeed, in the major population centres, some forms of surgery such as 'ear, nose and throat' are now largely undertaken in private hospitals. Hence, mechanisms to redistribute the training load will inevitably be required.

The skills mix is not always appropriate

It is not clear that the health workforce has the 'skills mix' to effectively deliver some of the care required by the community, or that the right mix of available skills is always brought to bear in service delivery. For example:

- Training regimes based on traditional professional demarcations can hinder the development of interdisciplinary and team-based health care.
- While the need for some on-the-job training is inevitable, the Commission has frequently heard that undergraduate training is not providing employees who are sufficiently 'work-ready'. (However, this is apparently less of an issue in the allied health care professions.)
- Practitioners may lack skills needed to successfully operate in particular work environments: