



Cottesloe Beach, Perth, Western Australia

A Medical Adventure Down Under

SMA and the Australian Medical Association (Western Australia) [AMA (WA)] have agreed on a collaboration to facilitate medical exchanges between Singapore and Australia. Through this initiative, doctors from each country will have the opportunity to embark on a six-month work experience in the other one.

General practitioners (GPs) in Singapore with qualifications recognised by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), or the Master in Family Medicine [MMed (FM)] or its equivalent, can apply for a placement in a regional centre or rural locations in Western Australia.

Dr Wong Tien Hua, Chairperson of SMA's Membership Committee and a GP in private practice, commented, "Offering this avenue for Singapore doctors to have an overseas stint will certainly be a rare opportunity that should not be missed. This six-month attachment will widen the doctor's views and offer exposure into a different professional environment that would otherwise be unavailable in Singapore. We think that this experience will be an invaluable opportunity for our members."

"Singapore doctors will have first hand exposure on how general practice in Australia operates and in the process, enrich their medical experiences and enjoy the wonderful environment, cool weather and unique culture. They can also take the opportunity to see a little more of Western Australia in their spare time," said Ms Noelle Jones, Director of Health & Community Services at AMA (WA).

Ms Jones added that doctors who have completed the MMed (FM) will be able to work in Australia as a GP. The application process includes several procedures, and AMA (WA) will provide guidance to doctors throughout, including sponsorship and placement. Doctors with the

MMed (FM) will not be required to take a pre-qualifying exam. This is good for those going to Australia on a short term basis, as AMA (WA) will arrange for the interview via videoconferencing with the Medical Board of Australia (MBA).

Ms Jones further advised that Singapore doctors will be paid in Australian dollars for their locum work by the private practices who engage them.

She then continued, "Singapore and Western Australia are already close in many ways, both professionally and culturally. The collaboration between our associations will bring us even closer.

"The tyranny of distance matters little when it comes to Medicine. Both nations are facing similar challenges in the area of health and well-being, and we can tackle them together through tools such as work exchanges.

"The AMA (WA) views this as an exciting start to a new relationship. We can learn so much from each other."

For those who are interested to embark on this medical adventure, please contact SMA or send in your CVs to: Australia Exchange, Singapore Medical Association, 2 College Road, Alumni Medical Centre Level 2, Singapore 169850, or email australia@sma.org.sg.



Ms Noelle Jones (left) and Dr Wong Tien Hua



Panorama of Perth

FAQs

- **What is the objective of this medical exchange?**

It is to enable doctors from both Australia and Singapore to embark on a 6 to 12 month work experience in each other's country. This gives doctors an opportunity to widen their views and enrich their experience in primary care overseas. They will also be able to experience a different healthcare system and its resulting challenges, and a different culture and environment.

For a start, we are working to allow GPs in Singapore the opportunity to undergo short term work placement in Australia – especially throughout Western Australia.

- **Is my current medical registration (licence) valid?**

Your qualifications and experience will be assessed by the MBA and classified under General/Full or Limited Registration. This will allow you to work in the practices that AMA has arranged for you.

- **What qualifications must I have to enter this programme?**

If you are already a Fellow with the RACGP or the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS), we can process your application under General/Full Registration to practise in Australia. You will not be required to take any further examinations or go through any supervised work-based assessment.

If you have an MMed (FM) from CFPS, your application will be classified under Limited Registration. You will undergo a Fitness for Intended Clinical Practice Interview by videoconferencing. Your placement will be subject to work-based assessment and supervision. Within 12 months of the commencement of your medical registration, you will be required to enrol and take the Acquired Knowledge Test.

Your AMA consultant will be able to provide you with more information, and assist you on this matter.

- **Do I get to choose where to work in Western Australia or elsewhere in Australia?**

You may do so but this also depends if there is a vacancy in the desired location, and if it is designated as a District of Workforce Shortage or an Area of Need. AMA works with various private practices and hospitals that are well spread out all over Australia. We will be pleased to assist as much as we can to make your choice possible.

- **How far away are these locations away from Perth?**

The locations are within one to five hours from Perth. However, most rural or regional practice sites are within 30 to 60 minutes of the nearest regional town.

- **Can I extend my visa if I choose to work beyond the 6 to 12 month period?**

Under this arrangement, you will be sponsored through Visa 457 as a temporary resident doctor. This visa is valid for up to four years and can be extended after this period conditionally, if you meet MBA's requirements.

Your AMA consultant will assist you further, should you decide to work beyond the 6 to 12 month period.

- **Do I have to buy my own professional indemnity insurance before I see patients in Australia?**

Yes.

- **Do I need to pay a fee to register myself to work in Australia?**

All statutory and regulatory fees are to be paid by the doctor.

- **How should I pay to get myself registered with MBA?**

There are several steps and your AMA consultant will be able to assist you further.

- **Do I need to undergo an English proficiency test?**

If your medium of instruction in school was not English, then you are required to take the IELTS exam to demonstrate your proficiency in the language.

- **Can I bring my family with me?**

Yes.

- **Will my spouse and/or children (above 18 years) be able to work?**

There are no restrictions on this.

- **How long will the application and approval process take, before I start work in Australia?**

It will depend on the completeness of all your documentation, which must be submitted to the relevant authorities. The process usually takes about six to nine months before a doctor is cleared to work in Australia.



- **Do I need to pay AMA a fee for processing my application?**

Our services are free to the candidate. The hospital, practice or facility you are placed at will be charged an administrative fee to manage your placement.
- **Will accommodation be provided?**

This will depend on the facility, location, and your position. The majority of practices, facilities or hospitals in Australia in regional areas will provide some form of accommodation and/or transport as part of your employment package. Your AMA consultant will advise you with regard to additional benefits.
- **Do I need to buy medical insurance for my family and myself in Australia?**

Yes, if your current health insurance does not extend to your coverage in Australia. You are required to have private health insurance either before you leave, or once you arrive in Australia. You and your family will not be covered by Medicare.
- **Who pays for the medical registration and immigration fees and charges?**

You are responsible for paying for your registration fees and visa charges.
- **Do I need character checks/police clearances?**

A police clearance will be required in order to confirm your employment offer or obtain a visa.
- **Will my personal details be protected?**

AMA respects your privacy and all personal information received will be kept in confidence, and will not be disseminated to third parties without your prior consent.
- **What medical tests will I need to undergo?**

You will need to undergo full medical tests as part of the visa requirements to work in Australia. These will include:

 - X-rays
 - HIV
 - Hepatitis B
 - Hepatitis C

Your AMA consultant will advise you in due course.
- **What is the practice model like for primary care in Australia?**

The practice models in rural and regional areas vary widely. Most of the GPs work in a group medical practice. They will have administrative and nursing support, and may also have allied health practitioners and dentists to provide a team-based approach to care and manage chronic illnesses.
- **How is the patient billed for services rendered?**

It is usually on per consultation basis. For some practices there is a “bulk bill” process where Medicare makes direct payment to you. This means you charge your bill to Medicare and patients do not pay any money to you. Other practices bill privately and the patient will be responsible for paying the account. The patient then recoups the rebate directly from Medicare.
- **How am I paid?**

During the period that you are with the private practice, you will be a salaried employee on an agreed minimum salary, or receive a percentage of your billings (usually between 50 to 70%), whichever is the greater.
- **How much am I expected to earn as a GP in Western Australia?**

There are several factors that determine your earning potential during the period, such as your qualifications (Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Emergency Medicine, General Surgery, etc), experience, location and the hours you work. You can expect to earn between A\$200,000 to A\$350,000 per year.
- **What are my working hours per week?**

This will vary by location, patient load and the practice itself. Practices usually allow you to work between 35 to 50 hours a week. They are usually flexible, and you may negotiate the hours you wish to work. In certain locations, you may be rostered to be on call on weeknights or weekends.
- **Will I be subject to Australian income tax?**

Yes.
- **Do I automatically get Australian permanent residency by taking up the 6 to 12 month work stint?**

No. This will be a different process altogether. AMA will be able to nominate you for permanent residency. Your AMA consultant will be able to provide further information on this matter. **SMA**