



Workshop: Sonographer workforce issues

Friday 31 July 2009

Eighteen participants – including government representatives, employer groups, university and private educator representatives, other professional groups and senior sonographers – attended the ASA's 2009 facilitated workshop on workforce issues. The group was collaborative and enthusiastic, achieving many positive outcomes.

Objectives:

- Develop a profile of an entry-level sonography practitioner
- Expose and explore barriers to recruiting new entrants to the profession

Introductory session:

The group was provided with an update on ASA projects related to workforce issues. ASA CEO Elaine Trevaskis reported on progress towards the implementation of recommendations from the 2008 ASA workforce workshop, including detailing the recommendations and conclusions from the scoping study funded by the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA). A report of the study has been completed and signed off by DoHA. It was noted that this will soon be available on the ASA website.

A key finding of the scoping study was that the scope of sonography practice in Australia is undefined. The study found that there is a wide range of practices in different settings and that some sonographers are practising at a level considered 'out-of-scope'. The meeting noted that the ASA has committed significant resources to the development of entry-level competencies to define the scope of practice that the profession expects of a new practitioner. It was noted that part of the workshop time allocation for the day has been allocated to progress this work.

Toward a definition of entry-level:

At the commencement of this session, a joint statement from the ADIA, ASUM and RANZCR was tabled, the key point of which was that the scope of sonography practice in Australia needs to be defined. The statement therefore was aligned with the findings of the scoping study and the objectives of the workshop.

Participants utilised the allocated time to scope competencies, utilising the competency set of the NOOSR project which was developed in 1992 and updated in 2000. It was noted that this competency set was used by ASAR as the basis for its Program Accreditation Guidelines. Whilst the group was able to define topics within this competency set, time limitations prevented identification of the depth of knowledge/skill required in the various topic areas identified. There was also significant discussion though no consensus regarding the required clinical ability of a new graduate as well as the limitations of the current training program.

Recommendation: That the ASA develop a discussion paper on the practical skills a new-graduate sonographer ought to possess and delivery options.

Recruitment to the profession:

The main barrier to recruitment of new students was identified as the lack of available clinical training places. Participants agreed that there are more applicants than clinical places and that the cost is the major barrier to increasing the number of positions. It was also noted that recognition and approval of overseas trained practitioners is cumbersome.

The cost of training new entrants was scoped. The issue of supporting trainers was highlighted, with the group discussing whether trainers were under-resourced and the lack of dedicated trainer/tutor/educator roles. The group spent some time considering the range of needs of trainers (clinical educators) and discussing ways to improve the quality of the clinical experience provided to new entrants.

Recommendation: That the ASA develop a government relations strategy to pursue funding for clinical places.