

ADVANCED STANDING FOR SPECIALIST TRAINING FROM THE UNSW MEDICINE PROGRAM

Information for students enrolled in the MBBS program at UNSW

In September 2007, UNSW Medicine reached in-principle agreement with the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR) and the Institute of Medical Education and Training of NSW Health (IMET), for its graduates to be able to seek advanced standing for specialist training in Pathology and Radiology. These arrangements, intended to take effect from the cohort graduating in December 2010, are possible because the Colleges accept that UNSW Medicine has the staff, resources and appropriate curriculum to be able to provide its graduates with a particularly strong foundation in Pathology and Anatomy, as well as the flexibility within the program to allow focused activities to be undertaken without any adverse impact on general medical training.

Subsequently, considerable progress has been made with respect to implementing the advanced standing pathway for training in Pathology. With respect to Radiology, RANZCR has maintained in-principle support, but implementation of advanced standing in its training program has been delayed pending finalisation of the new Radiology curriculum, which will not be introduced until 2010.

Details of the agreed arrangements for Pathology

- UNSW medical students with an interest in Pathology will be able to apply for the advanced standing pathway if they have at least a credit (65%) average mark after having completed Phase 1 and the clinical courses in Phase 2 of the program (i.e. 3 of the 6 years) [see Note 1]. If accepted, they can then:
 - undertake their Independent Learning Project (24 weeks full-time equivalent) in an area related to pathology or diagnostic imaging (or an intercalated BSc(Med) Honours year in a relevant area)
 - subsequently enrol in a specially designed 8 week cross-disciplinary selective course in Phase 3 (year 6) of the program, focusing on complex cases that illustrate various aspects of the use of investigative techniques in clinical diagnosis [see Note 1].
- UNSW and RCPA are developing a PGY1 educational package on the rational use of investigations, including resources for teachers and prevocational trainees. This is directly relevant to learning objectives of the Australian Curriculum Framework for Junior Doctors, so the core of this package will be made generally available to training networks. Graduates registered with RCPA for the advanced standing pathway will have access to further in-depth educational resources, and will demonstrate their understanding of the issues by completion of on-line self-assessments at an appropriate standard of performance [see Note 2].
- Subsequently, during PGY2, graduates will be able to undertake a 10-week term in Pathology, either as a discipline-based term or as an integrated term in co-operation with a relevant area of clinical medicine. IMET will be working with UNSW, the prevocational training networks/Area Health Services and RCPA to support development, implementation and accreditation of PGY2 terms for prevocational trainees in Pathology. It is proposed that the terms will be broadly-based and will facilitate the transition to accredited specialist training for those who are interested, but will not involve any subspecialisation. These terms will initially be offered within the South Eastern Sydney/Illawarra Area Health Service but are expected to be available to PGY2 graduates allocated to training networks outside this area.

- Collectively, the educational activities of the pathway will lead to 1 year of advanced standing in the 5-year training program of the RCPA (at least for training solely in laboratory Pathology viz. Anatomical Pathology, Microbiology, Chemical Pathology; it would usually be the case that a lesser duration of advanced standing would be available to those in a dual Fellowship program).
- Because RCPA is keen to maximise clinical experience in PGY1 and 2, undertaking activities in the advanced standing pathway is designed to have no impact on eligibility for registration or on the ability of graduates to attain generalist competencies during prevocational training. Nevertheless, students registering for the pathway will be able to engage with the College from the time of graduation, although completion of training/examination requirements within a reduced period of time will be dependent on maintaining a high level of performance.

What this means for you as a student is that if you have an interest in a career in Pathology, or wish to keep your options open for pursuing such a career, then provided your academic performance has been of sufficient standard, you may have the opportunity to gain advanced standing in the specialist training program if you select relevant elements during the latter part of your MBBS. In that case, you will need to give careful consideration to undertaking an appropriate Independent Learning Project. Because the general allocation of ILPs is random, you will need to organise a negotiated ILP in an area relevant to the practice of Pathology. The College will interpret "relevant" quite broadly e.g. you might undertake an ILP related either to the basic biology of disease or to diagnostic pathology.

If you negotiate a suitable ILP, register your intention to participate in the streaming pathway and subsequently achieve at least a 65% WAM to the end of your Phase 2 clinical courses, you will be eligible to enrol in the special Phase 3 selective. If you subsequently register with the College, you will be eligible for consideration for advanced standing, subject to gaining a position in the College's training program.

You should note that by applying for the advanced standing pathway, you will be availing of an option, not irrevocably committing to a career – there are in any case no absolute guarantees that you will be accepted into the College's training program. However, availing of the option would certainly provide you a significant advantage if you did commit to Pathology. You should also note that this option does not impact on your ability to undertake an elective term in Pathology, should you wish to do so.

Note 1: The requirement for a 65% average mark is imposed by UNSW, not by the College or IMET. Priority for access to the Phase 3 selective course will be given to students who complete Phase 2 clinical courses, select the advanced standing pathway, and then negotiate an appropriate ILP or Honours. However, students who first undertake a relevant ILP and subsequently achieve a 65% average mark after completing their Phase 2 clinical courses will be able to enrol in the Phase 3 selective if there are any unfilled places. Any further unfilled places will be available to academically able students with an interest in the subject area.

Note 2: A working group involving RCPA and UNSW Medicine is developing curriculum, resources and assessments for the PGY1 activities, as well as descriptors and curriculum for the PGY2 terms.

(Document updated by Rakesh K. Kumar, Director of Academic Projects, UNSW Faculty of Medicine – March 2009)