



Working In Australia



Australia's population is centred predominantly in the South Eastern coastal cities of Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide while the interior of the country – the Outback – is comprised of sparsely populated semi-desert and tropical wetlands. Perth on the western coast, Darwin on the northern coast and Tasmania as an island are well developed but isolated in themselves. This needs to be understood as Australia has huge problems to attract doctors into these rural, remote and isolated areas. Australia is a Commonwealth country comprising of six states and three territories. The health system is largely governed and budgeted by each state but subsidized by Commonwealth funding in certain areas. My experience is restricted to South Australia, Tasmania and partly Victoria.

My Personal Experience

I came to Australia twice, first in 1997 as an occupational trainee in psychiatry. In 2002 I returned to Austria to finish my specialty in psychiatry and returned back to Australia by the end of 2003, as my husband is Australian. Retrospectively seen I was absolutely unprepared for working in a "capitalistic" Commonwealth country when I came the first time. From day one on I carried full clinical responsibility, I had more patients allocated than a three years registrar, after the third week I was on night shifts and responsible in these for two psychiatric wards in two different hospitals 20 km apart with mainly phone management etc. To cut a long story short, I had to work extremely hard to keep my head above water and it was very stressful. Later I found out that this does not happen in all places where OTDs are being employed, but it does happen and even worse. My Austrian specialty in psychiatry was not fully recognized and I have to sit the written and verbal Australian fellowship exams (I also had to do six months child and adolescent psychiatry for which I had to move to Tasmania).

Opportunities for Overseas Trained Doctors (OTDs)

Australia is a multicultural country and as such recruits doctors from everywhere in

the world. European doctors (except from United Kingdom) are initially somewhat disadvantaged being unfamiliar with the Commonwealth structure/training and by the problem of language accent and proficiency. OTDs who apply for a permanent residency status have to sit the written part of the Australia Medical Council (AMC) exams before being allowed to work in Australia as doctors. These exams require extensive preparation and are quite expensive.

However, many OTDs are currently recruited on a temporary visa condition (occupational training visa, skill shortage visa, general practitioner visa) that is supported by a completely different judicial and political frame. Employment on a temporary visa can be facilitated individually through a Locum Service. All these OTDs are entitled only to limited or conditional registration with the Medical Board. Their visa condition depends largely onto their employer; currently they are allowed to work in Australia for a period up to four years.

My overall experience of working in Australia is a positive one. I have learned to work in a multidisciplinary team, which is very different to my European experience. I became less biased but also

more critical with societal and political interpretations and I learned a lot about clinical governance and economic implications. I have seen so many disease patterns (multicultural in all aspects) that I only knew from text books, psychiatric as well as about Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander with their spiritual belief system which is so contrary to westernized society. In summary "everything" is much tougher if an MD from abroad applies for a full registered professional medical job in Australia. All colleagues do face exams after a certain period of time and all exams are very time consuming and costly particularly if English is not the first language.

Contact:

Renate Mundi, MD
Senior Registrar in Psychiatry
Royal Adelaide Hospital/
Glenside Campus
renatemu@internode.on.net
www.goinginternational.org

The General Public salary schemes per annum in South Australia (SA):
Intern through to Senior Medical Practitioner: AU\$ 48.304–115.422
Consultant: AU\$ 114.331–150.440
Overtime and "back ups" or "on call" are additionally paid.
(Exchange rate from AU\$ to € 0,602)

Usual working hours:

72 hours fortnightly (!!) from Monday to Friday. However, there are huge differences in the amount of additional on-call (registrar) or back-up (consultant) shifts. In Tasmania consultants were covering the hospital (on call) for up to 7–14 days in a row.

Annual leave:

South Australia (SA): five weeks or 35 calendar days if on a 7-day roster
Tasmania (TAS): four weeks (but they appear to have more public holidays per annum)

www.humanservices.gov.au/

Homepage of the Australian government and department of human services. The Human Services agencies deliver social and health-related services in line with their legislation and customer service charters.

www.amc.org.au/

The Australian Medical Council is an independent national standards body for medical education and training.

www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-workforce-workforce-general.htm

General Information for Overseas Trained Doctors wanting to practice Medicine in Australia

www.theaustralian.news.com.au/

Australia's national daily newspaper.