

The written fellowship examinations for the RACGP can now be done online whilst on overseas deployments

Twice a year the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners conducts examinations to attain the qualification of Fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Up until now most regular ADF medical officers have reported significant difficulties in completion of GP training in a timely fashion. This appears to be due to conflicts between ADF operational requirements, and the need to undertake GP training and examinations in reliable and stable personal circumstances during examination periods.

In 2011, for the first time, the RACGP offered the written fellowship examinations online. In July 2011, I undertook the two written components of the fellowship examinations whilst deployed as Regimental Medical Officer, Force Support Unit Four, at Multinational Base Tarin Kot, Afghanistan.

A number of arrangements were necessary in order to undertake the examination in Afghanistan. Support from

the RACGP to undertake the examination remotely was obtained by lobbying from my training provider GP Synergy and personal direct contact. The RACGP kindly agreed to provide the political and logistical support to undertake the examination online overseas. Special consideration was granted on the basis of logistic difficulties and remoteness, allowing for reimbursement of examination fees in the event of misadventure (e.g. attack on base).

The examination was undertaken on the welfare internet with support of the Force Communications Unit, invigilated by the Officer Commanding Force Support Team Tarin Kot. The software ran flawlessly for the duration of the examination. The software utilised captured web browser technology, but is not currently authorised on the Defence Restricted Network (DRN). An important next step for future ADF registrars would be gaining approval to run the examination software on the DRN.

This is the first time the RACGP fellowship examination has been completed in this way for an ADF registrar, and the first time conducted outside of Australian territory online by any candidate. It opens the door for ADF registrars to undertake the written examination on operational deployment, on ships at sea, in support areas, on exercise and in other remote locations. This new examination option will likely decrease the difficulties that future ADF medical officers face in completing RACGP fellowship requirements. Continued high level cooperation between the ADF, GP training providers and RACGP will ensure that the flexibility and benefits made accessible by this development will be available for ADF registrars in the future.

David J Heslop
PhD (Medicine) MBBS BSc (Adv) Hons I
Captain.
RMO, 1st Health Support Battalion
Manunda Lines
Holsworthy Barracks NSW 2173
david.heslop@defence.gov.au

