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MEDICAL "IRON CURTAINS"

Australian medicine has long enjoyed a close relationship with postgraduate medical institutions in the United Kingdom. Since colonial times, our doctors have journeyed to the "Motherland" for postgraduate training in historic hospitals, and to secure fellowships from the Royal Colleges in London, Edinburgh and Dublin. Indeed, our own specialist colleges, upon their foundation, borrowed heavily from their British counterparts and even saw fit to include the prestigious "Royal" in their titles.

However, this close association with the British Isles has been in gradual decline since Federation, and was recently dealt yet another blow when the UK Home Office barred graduates from Australia and other Commonwealth countries from training in the UK National Health Service. This drastic action has been undertaken to preserve training positions for the increasing numbers of students graduating from UK medical schools.

Paradoxically, at the same time, Australia is facing the very real possibility that the availability of training positions for local graduates may soon reach crisis point, if the Australian governments continue to pursue the policy of unrestricted importation of British doctors to fill vacancies in our hospitals.

Will the UK's imposition of an "Iron Curtain" have a downstream effect on Australian medical trainees? What problems will we confront when the predicted increased numbers of Australian medical graduates consider entering postgraduate training? How will we manage the fierce competition for positions when we find that, by and large, foreign graduates occupy them?

Without a doubt, Britain's Iron Curtain for postgraduate medical training will impact on the education of our home-grown specialists. It is vital that we have a carefully considered plan of action; we should be loath to embark on a tit-for-tat embargo.

But should we fail to protect the interests of Australian graduates, we may well witness a generation of disillusioned doctors.

Martin B Van Der Weijden

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February MJA BookClub Winners

Congratulations to: Dr Anna Fletcher, North Perth, WA; Dr Valerie Sharp, Dover, TAS; and Dr David Warner, Balgownie, NSW. Each wins a set of *Netter's Anatomy Flash Cards: Head and Neck*. Thanks to everyone who purchased books from the February MJA BookClub and went into the draw. Pictured right is Alexandra Rot, from AMPCo's Information Processing/Sales and Marketing, drawing the February winners. To see this month's MJA BookClub's great offers, see page 400 and the inside back cover of this issue.

