

FRANZCOG Training in Resource-Limited Settings

Background

Interest in global health training and provision of health care for those living in countries where medical services are limited is growing worldwide. The College receives requests from trainees wishing to undertake placements in resource-limited settings that can be credited towards their Basic or Advanced FRANZCOG training. It is recognised that these positions can provide valuable and rewarding training experiences for those who undertake them; and education, support and capacity building for the organisations and communities who host the placement.

This document outlines the steps and circumstances in which training in resource-limited settings may be credited. Such training, if deemed suitable, could be approved as a substitute for the rural rotation for trainees in Basic Training.

It is important that positions for credited training are safe, effective and ethically defensible (including consideration of impact on the training of the local doctors) and are prospectively approved by the Chairs of the State, NZ and Federal Training Accreditation Committee (TAC). Approval will be based on the merits of the post, the experiences outlined in the position description, the type and level of supervision that will be available, the learning objectives of the trainee and their level of training.

Potential benefits of a placement in a resource-limited setting

Benefits to the trainee can include:

- Exposure to different pathologies, conditions and models of patient care and follow-up care
- Refinement of diagnostic skills and management of conditions in the absence of ready access to expensive tests
- Enhanced capabilities to choose between multiple and competing priorities without the immediate assistance of an expert team
- Opportunities to manage and train staff, including local health care workers, medics and junior doctors
- Appreciation of unique challenges within different health care systems
- Opportunities to enhance teaching, management, leadership and cultural skills and research opportunities
- Improved cultural safety; enhanced personal awareness and appreciation of the complexities of enacting change as a visitor
- Increased confidence, competence and independence in core operative skills
- Professional and personal satisfaction
- Potential academic opportunities with a local university

Benefits to the health service or host community can include:

- Provision of additional workforce to the local health service or institution
- Enhanced clinical and non-clinical knowledge and service delivery to local populations
- Assistance and support for local staff as well as learning new teaching skills and practices
- Facilitation of system improvements to disadvantaged populations
- Contribution to a better organisational culture and patient outcomes
- Development of long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships between Australia and/or New Zealand and overseas health services
- Opportunity to improve capacity to deliver clinical teaching and training as well as clinical obstetric and gynaecological care

Factors to consider when applying for positions in overseas resource-limited settings

Numerous Overseas Training Institutions, Health Services and Global Organisations such as Australian Volunteers International (AVI), Out of Country Experience (OOCE) and Medecins Sans Frontieres offer placements overseas for trained doctors. Position descriptions vary, as do the places and associated challenges.

As with any position, trainees must assess the risks and understand who the employment contract is with (generally the facility rather than the organisation involved in facilitating the role) and who is responsible for their care and security whilst in the position. Trainees also need to consider costs for things such as work permits, visas, medical registration, vaccinations, health insurance, travel expenses, psychological preparation, and accommodation as these are generally the responsibility of the trainee.

Some positions offer payment and contribution to living expenses and some may involve lecturing duties and/or research opportunities with a local university in addition to the clinical and teaching duties in the hospital or outreach services. It is important that the expectations and responsibilities involved in the position are clearly outlined and that the trainee considers these when assessing their own learning objectives prior to considering a role.

The process for gaining prospective approval

Prospective approval for training to be credited in resource-limited settings for up to 12 months will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by application to the Chair of the relevant State or NZ TAC and the Chair of the Federal TAC. Placements in these settings are considered suitable for trainees who have satisfactorily completed at a minimum, Years 1 and 2 of the FRANZCOG Training program. Trainees should complete the standard Prospective Approval form and provide additional information about the position description, expected learning outcomes, expected rosters, theatre lists and supervision that will be provided.

Training credit to be awarded

The State or NZ and Federal TAC Chairs may award fractional credit (i.e. 0.5-0.9) where there is less than 50% of time spent in women's health clinical work. Where less than 25% of time is spent in women's health clinical work, no training credit will be awarded.

Minimum Criteria for approval of training posts

It is important that training positions in overseas settings should:

- be relevant to trainees undertaking the FRANZCOG training program
- have a clear educational imperative and provide trainees with appropriate clinical exposure and experience which may complement that normally provided in major ITP hospital
- represent a genuine learning and training opportunity with appropriate clinical experience
- maximise trainee experience as the primary operator (in keeping with the trainee's relevant experience)
- provide trainees with appropriate supervision, assessment, and support from senior medical staff at the relevant site (accepting that Training Supervisors may not be RANZCOG Fellows)
- involve appropriate quality assurance and risk management strategies including medical indemnity relevant to the position
- include educational experiences such as case reviews, teaching, ward rounds, high-risk obstetric and mortality and morbidity meetings where possible
- involve safe working hours and shifts within the local context, recognising the need for some flexibility
- ideally provide access to IT facilities and the internet
- provide leave for professional development if appropriate

Training Supervision

All trainees require a local Training Supervisor. If a RANZCOG Fellow is not at the site, a trained O&G specialist who is qualified to practice O&G in the country where the position is located may act as the local supervisor in conjunction with a remotely placed FRANZCOG. It is essential that the supervision arrangements have been clarified with the facility and any organisation involved in facilitating the position. In exceptional circumstances the supervising medical practitioner may have extensive O&G experience in resource-limited settings without necessarily being an O&G specialist.

Training Supervisors will be required to conduct the standard 3- and 6- monthly formative and summative assessments for the FRANZCOG Training program and provide support, mentoring and feedback. The normal timelines apply.

All trainees could also benefit from a mentor relationship with a RANZCOG Fellow or Trainee who has previously worked in the same or a similar setting and has knowledge and understanding of some of the challenges likely to be involved.