

10 tips for getting started in training

#1 Know what you are getting yourself into

- Research the practice you have applied to or have been allocated to.
- Get to know the community and location of the practice you will be working in.
- Practice profiles and websites give info on patient fees which can guide discussions on your remuneration.

#2 Know what you are entitled to

- GPs generally operate as small businesses and you will be paid under an individual employment agreement. This is very different to hospitals where doctors are paid a salary based on an award.
- Employment agreements are based on the National Terms and Conditions for the Employment of Registrars (NTCER)¹. The NTCER dictates the minimum requirements, but each employment contract is considered an individual agreement and stands alone. Make sure you read NTCER (which complies with the National Employment Standards (NES)).
- Registrars are employees of training practices, not contractors. They are entitled to superannuation, paid annual leave and personal/careers leave and the other minimum entitlements of the NES.

#3 Understand how things will work for you at the training practice, before you start

- Rostering, including: admin time, educational release, on-call, after-hours, home visits, hospital work, overtime, work on public holidays and weekends.
- Patient load, the average number of patients per hour and how this compares with your RTO recommendations.
- When you can take leave and can you take leave in advance.
- In-practice teaching (protected time and non-protected) and supervision.

#4 Know how your pay is determined

- Understand how you will be paid and how your percentage of billings/receipts and other allowances are calculated and over what time period (frequency of payment cycle).
- Full-time employment under NTCER is 38 hrs/week (averaged over 4 weeks). This may not be the same as your full-time training requirements depending on your program. If you work less than 38 hours your base salary can be pro rated.
- Make sure you read your payslips.

#5 Be prepared to negotiate

- The NTCER are the minimum terms that you are entitled to. You may be able to negotiate a better deal. This may be a little scary, but you never know unless you ask.
- In preparing to negotiate, think about what are you willing to give and what would you like in exchange.
- Be realistic!

#6 Get it in writing and understand what you are signing

- Do not rely on verbal agreements!
- Don't make assumptions about your working conditions.
- Ensure that your rostering and actual working hours, leave, remuneration, in-practice education scheduling, supervision arrangements, and other employment and training conditions are covered and documented in your employment agreement. This will avoid confusion or misunderstandings and will be a basis for discussion should there be any disagreements in the future.
- Use the GPRA employment agreement template².
- Take your time to read the employment agreement carefully before you sign and ask questions.

#7 Make sure you have a signed agreement in place before you start working

- Read, understand AND sign your employment agreement.
- It's a legally binding document so make sure you understand all of it!
- Keep a copy for your record.

#8 Be ready for a different approach to medical practice

- Practicing medicine in the community is very different to the hospital context.
- Talk to your RLO and/or your supervisor if you are anxious, nervous or uncertain about this....
- Renew any education subscriptions from the hospital prior to starting GP (not all RTOs have access to resources like UpToDate etc).

#9 Look after yourself

- GP training can be fun and very rewarding, but it can also be stressful.
- If issues do arise - with your practice, RTO, college - attempt to resolve them as early as possible.
- Know who to turn to for help and seek help early – don't forget your RLO and GPRA!
- Get your own GP, if you don't have one, and consider yearly preventative checks - you are human too...
- Have strategies:
- maintain a healthy life balance - exercise, sleep, diet and leisure activities - its what we tell our patients to do to look after themselves!
- Have something outside medicine to keep the passion going in the consulting room
- Have some stress management strategies in place before you get stressed. It will happen and proactively protecting yourself is the best prevention. There are many online resources^{3 4}.
- know who call for assistance if faced with a crisis⁵.

#10 Join GPRA

- Membership is FREE!
- We provide advice on terms & conditions, support in times of difficulty, advocacy on registrar issues, resources to assist with training & exam prep, peer support and networking.
- Also consider AMA membership and/or continuing union membership from hospital – this can be useful back up if you get into a complex workplace dispute.

¹ <https://gpra.org.au/national-terms-and-conditions-for-the-employment-of-registrars/>

² <https://gpra.org.au/employment-agreement-template/>

³ https://www.ranzcp.org/Files/Branches/Victoria/Keeping_the_Doctor_Alive-pdf.aspx

⁴ <https://www.doctorportal.com.au/doctorshealth/>

⁵ <http://dhas.org.au/>