

The Advertiser

Pharmacy jobs: The Advertiser

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Chemists all class

POSTGRADUATES

Future pharmacy graduates should not be concerned about an oversupply of pharmacists, reports Lauren Ahwan.

PREDICTIONS that pharmacy graduates will struggle to find work due to an oversupply of pharmacists have been downplayed by experts, who say the situation is not as dire as initial reports suggest.

A workforce model developed by consultancy Human Capital Alliance, released earlier this year, has estimated there could be a surplus of 2009 pharmacists in Australia within the next five years.

By 2020, a surplus of 2594 pharmacists is predicted, rising to 3582 by 2025.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia state president Ian Todd believes universities are accepting too many pharmacy students but says future graduates should not be concerned.

"The universities have been chugging out increasing numbers of pharmacy graduates. My personal opinion is that in the past, universities realised there was a shortage and they have overshot the mark," Mr Todd says.

"But I wouldn't say it's dire. You usually overshoot these things for a few years but then students will realise it's hard to get jobs and things will even out."

In June, four pharmacy schools - including the University of South Australia - formed the National Alliance for Pharmacy Education (NAPE) to advance both undergraduate and postgraduate pharmacy education in Australia.

Mr Todd believes NAPE will improve the situation for pharmacy graduates by identifying ways to expand the scope of pharmacists, subsequently increasing their demand.

"By broadening the skills of graduates, there's a lot more chance they will be taken up into meaningful primary health care roles," he says.

"NAPE might focus on some of those wider areas of primary health care that pharmacists can be involved in, rather than just focusing on dispensing and so on."

Already, pharmacists are responsible for more than supplying and dispensing medication.

They also provide information to the public and medical practitioners, review medications and advise doctors about drug therapies and disease management.

Hospital pharmacists may also perform clinical and research duties, such as drug trials.

UniSA School of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences head Jason White believes there is a role for pharmacists beyond the traditional interpreting and dispensing of prescriptions.

“People are finding employment without a great deal of difficulty. It might not always be exactly the role they had in mind but that's often true of graduates anywhere,” he says.

“There certainly are going to be more opportunities opening up in the future and there's certainly still plenty of potential for pharmacists.

“As long as they're willing to look at a variety of different roles, then there are still significant employment opportunities.” He hopes UniSA graduates have an advantage through their connection with NAPE. “What (employers of NAPE-affiliated graduates) are getting is a guaranteed high level of education - the best pharmacy education in the country,” he says.

“Students from other pharmacy schools may get an education, but we have that extra guarantee of quality teaching.”

Fourth-year UniSA student and immediate past president of the South Australian Pharmacy Students Association Anna Cooter, 21, is confident of securing a pharmacy job after graduating, despite predictions of a pharmacist oversupply.

“I'm aware that it's a competitive field,” says Ms Cooter, who is a councillor of the national Pharmacy Students Association.

“I personally would like to get into hospital pharmacy - which is more difficult because there are not many places available.

“But I'm not too concerned about getting a job.”

Ms Cooter hopes the new alliance, which involves Melbourne's **Monash University**, the University of Sydney and the University of Queensland, will provide greater opportunities for students.

“It's quite exciting. It will give a greater unification (of education) amongst graduates (from different states),” she says.

“That means it will be quite easy to transition between different states to work as a locum pharmacist.”