

# Open Letter to SA Medical Students

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Dear Colleagues,

As you've undoubtedly heard, Australia is in the midst of an internship crisis and South Australia is the first state at risk of domestic students being unable to gain internships. The table below outlines projected deficits in internship positions in South Australia in the coming years. The crisis will reach a peak in 2018 when it is predicted there will be a shortfall of 39 places for domestic medical students.

Intern Year	FLD CSP	FLD Int	ADL CSP	ADL Int	Total Shortfall	Domestic Shortfall
2016	105	18	145	25	46	4
2017	113	26	156	19	67	22
2018	118	14	168	34	87	39
2019	123	17	134	38	65	10

Since identifying the magnitude of the problem, the Australian Medical Students' Association, Adelaide and Flinders University medical student societies have brought the issue to the attention of the Deans of both Universities, SA MET, AMA(SA), the Health Minister and the general public through letters, meetings, print media under the banner of the #internshipsinSANity campaign.<sup>1</sup>

On the 17th of November, the AMSA President and representatives from AMSS and FMSS met with David Swan, the CEO of SA Health, and Professor Paddy Phillips, the Chief Medical Officer of SA. They discussed the projected internship shortfall and the impact of losing funding for 23 PGPPP positions in the 2014 federal budget.

The major point of contention is a written commitment called the COAG Communique made in 2006 by all state governments which states;

*“As the major employer in the sector, the States and Territories have always partnered the Commonwealth in its education of medical and nursing students by providing clinical placements. The States and Territories have agreed to guarantee to provide high-quality clinical placements and intern training for Commonwealth-funded medical and nursing students.”<sup>2</sup>*

Based on projected intern numbers, South Australia Health was unable to “guarantee” that all domestic graduates will receive internships in the meeting. It is predicted that this will see all international students and a number of domestic students missing out on an internship place in 2018. This will set an unwelcome precedent for future South Australian medicine cohorts and may trigger a domino effect with other states following South Australia's precedent and reducing the minimum number of internships supplied for domestic students.

A pilot for a merit-based system was proposed as an option for ranking students to decide who should be employed and thus address the lack of funding from SA Health. However the introduction of such a pilot would set a precedent for the use of a merit-based system in the future, which will facilitate SA

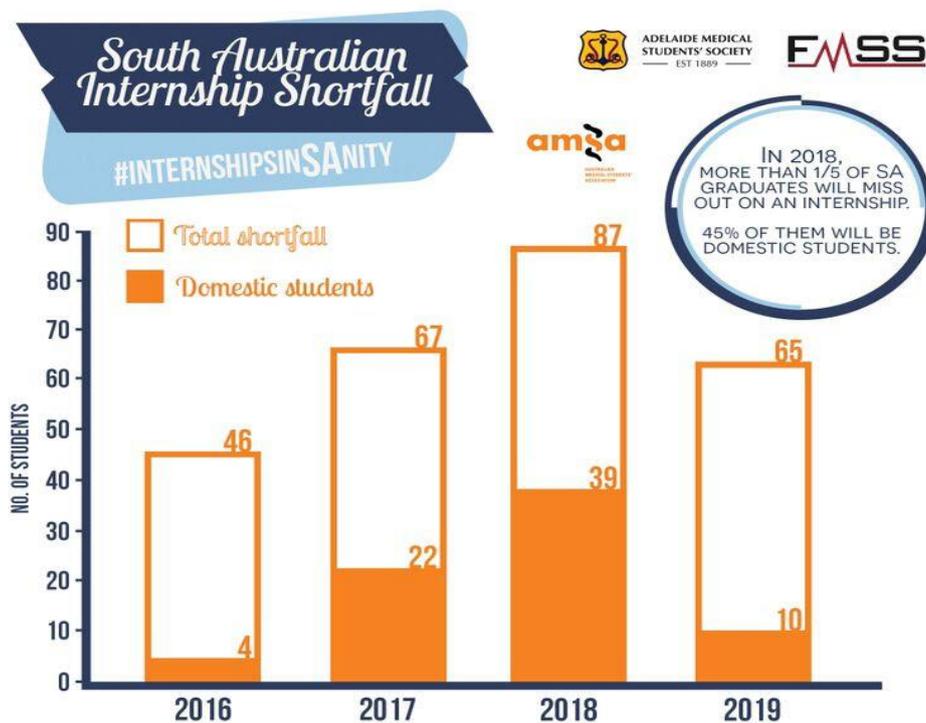
<sup>1</sup> Full details and copies of all correspondence can be found on the FMSS website: <http://bit.ly/FMSS-intern-crisis>

<sup>2</sup> Extract from COAG Communique July 2006 (Appendix D: Health Workforce) <http://bit.ly/COAG2006>

Health to become the first state to breach the COAG 2006 guarantee and not provide South Australian internships for all its medical students.

A merit-based system would be difficult and potentially expensive to implement, given the disparate assessment structures of the Adelaide and Flinders University courses. It would impact on student mental health, with additional stress placed upon students who have little time and information to prepare for this new merit-based allocation system. A merit-based system could lead to a brain drain for regional areas with more well resourced, metropolitan hospitals running stronger recruitment campaigns. AMSA, FMSS and AMSS oppose the premise of a merit-based internship allocation system as it fails to address the chronic underfunding of the South Australian health system and will be used in lieu of funding internships to all domestic students.

In the coming months this situation may precipitate the need for both Adelaide and Flinders medical students to mobilise in the #internshipsinSA nity campaign and we will require your support. This will take the form of contacting your local MP to voice your concerns about the internship crisis and as a last resort, rallying in Adelaide in scrubs. We need all the help we can get in the coming months, so if you're interested in helping with running the campaign, send us an email at [internshipsinSA nity@amsa.org.au](mailto:internshipsinSA nity@amsa.org.au).



Sincerely,

**FMSS**  
FLINDERS MEDICAL STUDENTS' SOCIETY

*Nick Stock*  
Nick Stock  
FMSS President 2015

ADELAIDE MEDICAL STUDENTS' SOCIETY  
EST 1889

*Shane Selvanderan*  
Shane Selvanderan  
AMSS President 2015

**amsa**  
AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

*James Lawler*  
James Lawler  
AMSA President 2015