

IN SUPERVISION



GP/RG supervision: the benefits

The apprenticeship model of GP/RG training is designed to provide high quality supervision to registrars training on the job. A strong supervisor-registrar alliance is the cornerstone of successful training outcomes, supporting registrars to develop skills and confidence to practice safely and independently.

The future of general practice depends on the willingness of experienced GP/RGs to join the supervision community and train the next generation of GP/RGs; the importance of their role in sustaining general practice in Australia cannot be overstated. Alongside the community and training benefits that supervisors provide, there are also many tangible and intangible benefits to supervisors themselves.

This information sheet outlines some of the key rewards and benefits of supervision – drawing on published literature and GPSA's research with supervisors – to help inform decisions about becoming a supervisor.

Why join the supervision community?

When we ask supervisors why they do what they do, they tell us about the immense personal and professional satisfaction they get from mentoring the next generation of GP/RGs, contributing to their development, and witnessing their success.

*"It makes you stay up-to-date; it makes you think about your own practice, it makes me safer, in clinical reasoning and so forth."*¹

GP/RG supervision promotes:

- **Lifelong learning**

Supervision of learners across the training pipeline helps GP/RGs maintain their currency with evidence-based practice refines their clinical reasoning, and enhances their patient care^{1,2}.

- **Reciprocal learning**

Supervision fosters reciprocal learning, as learners bring fresh perspectives that highlight and encourage reflective practice. Supervisors often report that supervision strengthens their teaching, leadership and communication skills, making the experience both professionally and personally rewarding¹.

- **Culture of learning**

Supervision reinforces a culture of learning within the practice environment, engaging the practice team in the pursuit of lifelong learning, professional development and quality improvement. With their strong appetite for learning, registrars can reinvigorate discussions that support best practice^{1,2}.

- **Future-proofing workforce sustainability**

Practices may also benefit from having learners – particularly registrars – share the clinical load, easing workload pressures¹. Additionally, many practices benefit from long-term retention of registrars post-fellowship, future-proofing their workforce¹. More broadly, supervision plays a crucial role in workforce sustainability and succession planning, ensuring ongoing access to skilled GP/RGs in different settings across Australia².

"It's such a good way to keep your practice current and continue learning and growing as a doctor...I think it should be the default...why wouldn't every GP supervise?"
(GP supervisor, remote NT, Australia)

"A lot of us do it because we believe it's important, and we want to support people well...I just remember being so grateful to those supervisors who would drop whatever doing, and come when you called because you needed help, and you want to do that for other people as well."
(former GP supervisor, regional QLD, Australia)

"That's the main reason why [we] have registrars and being in our small town is succession planning and our community. That's the main reason why we have this philosophy of 'grow your own'."
(GP supervisor, rural VIC, Australia)

Why do we need more women GP/RG supervisors?

By contributing their own insights and lived experiences, supervisors play a vital role in supporting and shaping the next generation of GP/RGs.

With women well outnumbering men entering GP training³, and a high proportion of AGPT registrars born and/or trained outside Australia⁴, it is important that learners coming through the system **see themselves** represented in a diverse community of supervisors, each bringing their own unique experiences and perspectives to clinical practice and GP/RG training¹.

For example, supervisors who completed their primary medical degree outside of Australia may have nuanced insight into the challenges experienced by International Medical Graduate (IMG) registrars, and – with the benefit of firsthand experience – anticipate some of the supports that IMG registrars may require¹.

Ultimately, supervision is not one-size-fits-all; registrars preparing for a career in this multi-faceted, dynamic specialty benefit from different styles, approaches, and perspectives to GP/RG training as well as clinical practice.

Encouraging and supporting a diverse supervisory workforce ensures registrars are exposed to a range of different role models – some of whom they may identify with more - which ultimately strengthens the capacity for general practice to meet the needs of the Australian population.

“The thing that appeals to me about supervising down the track is that I learned best that way...it's that ‘see one, do one, teach one’ thing, but that really consolidates my practice for me.”
(newly Felloved GP registrar, metro VIC, Australia)

“There'll be a handful of people who say, Oh, my gosh! My supervision as a junior doctor was so inadequate, so I'm gonna become a supervisor.”
(former GP supervisor, metro SA, Australia)

[Watch a brief video](#) by former RACGP President, Dr Nicole Higgins on why we teach.

References

1. Couch D, O'Sullivan B, Russell D et al. An exploration of the experiences of GP registrar supervisors in small rural communities: a qualitative study. BMC Health Services Research 2020; 20: 834.
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2. Ingham G, Fry J, O'Meara P et al. GP supervisors – an investigation into their motivations and teaching activities. AFP 2014; 43(11): 808-812.
3. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. General Practice: Health of the Nation 2024. East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP, 2024.
4. Taylor R, Clarke L, Hsien M. Australian General Practice Training Program National report on the 2023 National Registrar Survey. Australian Council for Educational Research 2024.