Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

2 June 2017

Dear colleague,

Consultation on expansion of undergraduate medical education – changes to the point of registration

The British Medical Association (BMA) is an apolitical professional association and independent trade union, representing doctors and medical students from all branches of medicine across the UK and supporting them to deliver the highest standards of patient care.

We have already submitted our response to the questions in the consultation on expansion of undergraduate medical education. We are now responding separately to the invitation within the consultation document to submit views on changes to the point of registration.

The proposed expansion of undergraduate medical education and the proposed introduction of a medical licensing assessment provide no justification for reopening the question of whether the point of full registration of doctors should be moved to the point of graduation from medical school. We believe that any such move would put standards of patient care at risk.

Our starting point is the need to maintain the quality of medical education and training and hence the standards of patient care. The key to meeting this need is ensuring that anyone who attains full registration in the future will have met the standards of competence which are currently required of those who attain it through completion of the first year of the foundation programme.

We believe that, unless there were an associated move to lengthen medical school programmes, an attempt to incorporate the clinical experience currently provided in the first year of the foundation programme into undergraduate curricula would lead to a reduction in the level of competence required for full registration.

The first year of the foundation programme provides opportunities for medical graduates to participate in and to provide diagnoses and treatment under close supervision which cannot be matched by current clinical placements in medical school. It allows them to learn through experience and to increase their confidence in their abilities. It also creates significant opportunities for trainers to identify, to supervise and to support trainees who may be struggling with their clinical responsibilities.

Doctors undertake some of their most intensive and useful learning during this year. The pressure of responsibility helps them to obtain crucial skills relating to real decision making, working under pressure and leading a clinical team.
We think it is unrealistic to expect that changes to the undergraduate curriculum could offer an adequate substitute for this vital experience. Even if they could, other valuable aspects of medical education would then be lost.

Furthermore, the transition from medical school to medical practice is one of the most challenging stages of a doctor’s career. It is likely that, if provisional registration were scrapped and the point of full registration moved to graduation, this transition would become even more difficult.

We therefore call on the Department of Health to reject any proposal to move the point of full registration to the point of graduation from medical school.

Yours sincerely,

Raj Jethwa
Director of Policy