

Considerations for Specialty Training in Waikato's International Medical Graduates

Rebecca Sundaresan¹, Carol Stevenson¹, Wayne de Beer¹

¹Clinical Education and Training Unit, Waikato Hospital, Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora

BACKGROUND

International Medical Graduates (IMGs) form an integral part of the New Zealand health workforce. While many work in New Zealand for a short period before returning to their home for speciality training, increasing numbers are choosing to train and live in New Zealand. Several factors have been previously sighted for this including work-life balance, availability of training positions, and supportive specialists. At the end of each training year, interns at Waikato Hospital are invited to participate in a voluntary survey that explores factors when considering specialty training.

To understand how IMGs hope to reach their goals, we explored influences on their decisions when considering specialty training.

METHODS

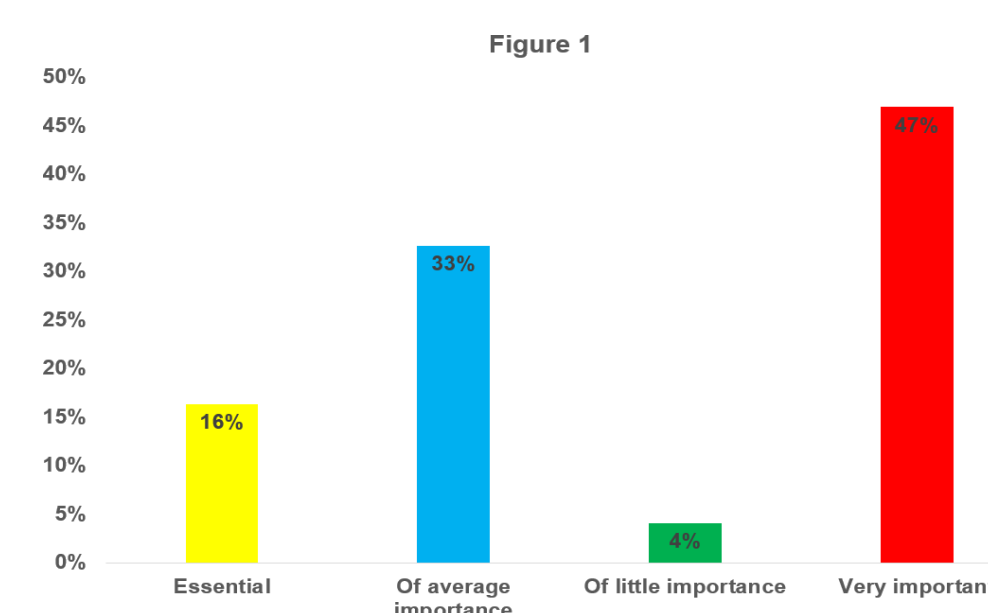
Interns at Waikato Hospital over a five-year period (2019 – 2024) were invited to participate in a voluntary survey that explored their career aspirations and pathways. Using a Likert scale, participants were asked to respond to statements covering a range of factors previously explored in existing literature as important when deciding on specialty training. Data related to responses from IMGs were extracted and analysed using descriptive statistics. All data was de-identified.

RESULTS

A total of 300 interns participated in the survey over the five-year period, of which 51 (17%) were IMGs. Within the IMG cohort, 51% identified as female, with the majority aged 25-30.

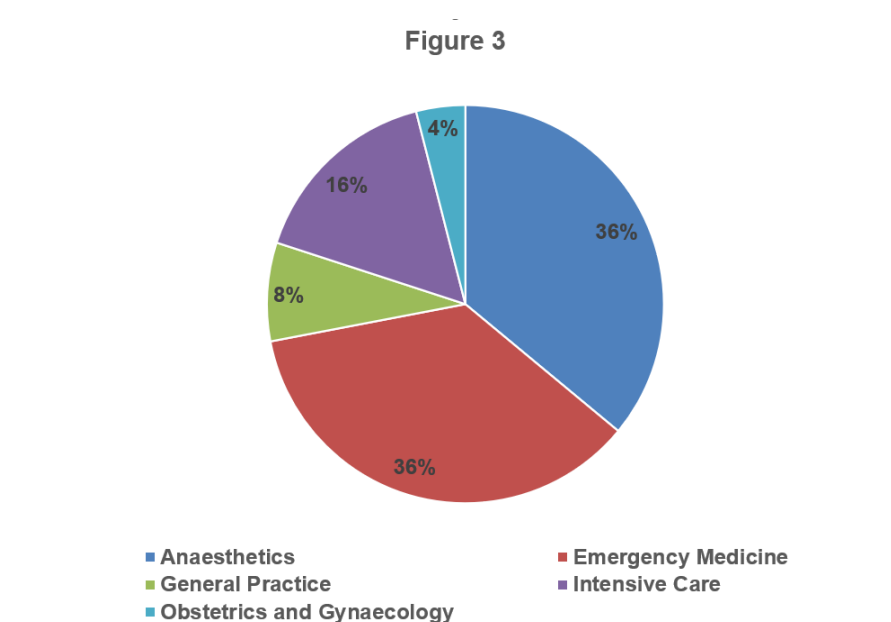
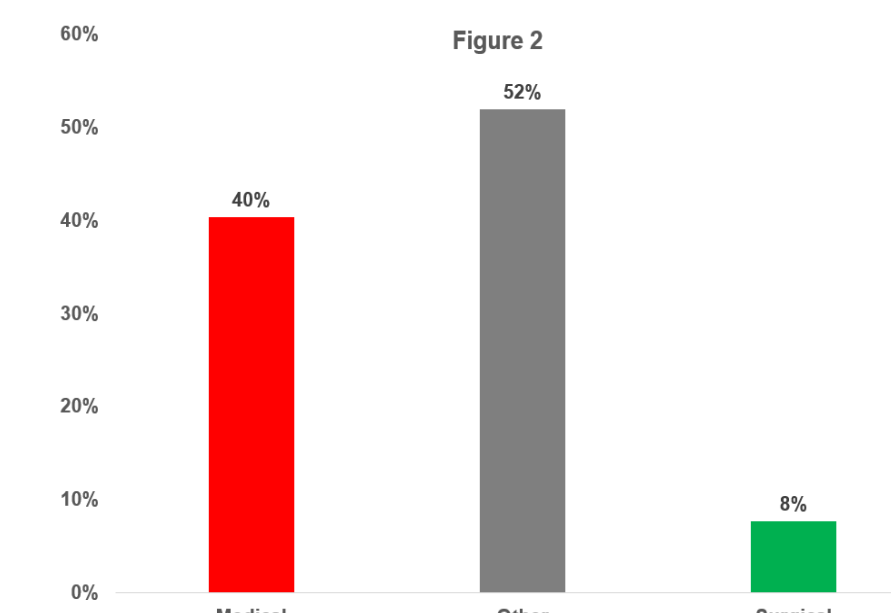
IMGs emphasized the need for specialty training pathways that balance professional development with personal time, helping to prevent burnout and promote career satisfaction. They preferred specialties offering flexible work hours, mentorship, supportive learning environments, and clear career progression. Access to resources for continuous skill development, particularly in specialized fields, and opportunities for research were also important. Additionally, IMGs valued cultural integration support, highlighting the need for tailored orientation and ongoing assistance to help them transition smoothly into the healthcare system.

RESULTS



A diverse range of tasks and opportunities within their roles is crucial for many respondents when considering their job satisfaction and career growth (Figure 1). It highlights that IMGs value variety in their work, seeking roles that allow them to develop a broad skill set, face new challenges, and avoid monotony.

Engaging in diverse tasks keeps them motivated and enhances their adaptability and professional development, making them more competitive in their chosen fields. This variety can lead to a more fulfilling career, offering opportunities for continuous learning and the chance to explore different areas of medical practice.

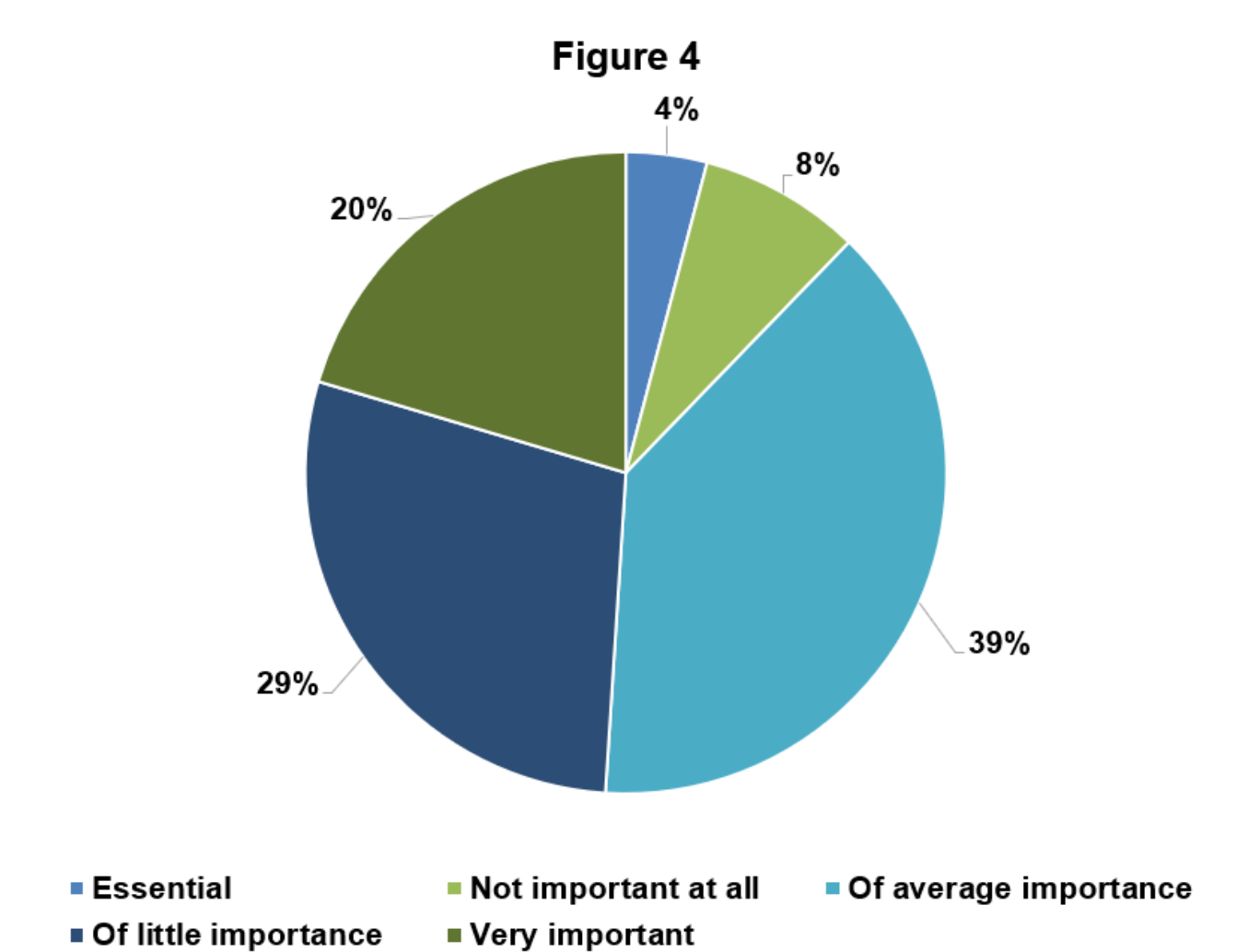


A high inclination towards medical fields, with specializations like general medicine, cardiology, and emergency medicine being popular choices. Fewer IMGs chose surgical pathways such as neurosurgery or general surgery, suggesting that factors such as personal interest, work-life balance, or career opportunities may influence their preference for non-surgical fields (Figure 2). Breakdown of Other specialities (Figure 3)

TESTIMONIAL

"Training in NZ has been an incredibly fulfilling experience. The opportunity to work in a diverse healthcare environment, while balancing a fulfilling personal life, has allowed me to grow both professionally and personally. The focus on varied work experience and community impact is something I truly value, and it's been an honour to contribute to the well-being of New Zealand's population"

All IMGs stated they were well-versed in courses and programs that could improve their chances of being selected for vocational or specialized training. While not all expressed an interest in rural placements, some favoured urban environments for their training. 8% of women and 4% of men expressed interest in working with Indigenous communities as part of their specialty training.



A significant proportion of respondents expressed a strong interest in staying in New Zealand long term. Additionally, there is a clear desire among many IMGs to make a meaningful impact to the community, which reflects their motivation to contribute to societal well-being through their medical practice (Figure 4).

CONCLUSIONS

While the findings from this survey are not generalizable to IMGs across New Zealand, they do suggest that newer graduates place significant value on having greater control over their work schedules and achieving a work-life balance. However, considering the ongoing health inequities, particularly in rural and indigenous communities, it is essential that these new doctors are prepared to work in such environments to help improve health outcomes and develop stronger social awareness.

It is also possible that some IMGs may not fully recognize these disparities, as many have not trained in New Zealand and may lack awareness of the unique health challenges faced by indigenous populations. This could lead to a preference for avoiding work in these communities, highlighting the need for targeted education and support to better equip IMGs to engage with and address these inequities.