

1 Main features

The medical labour force in 1999

In 1999 there were 55,218 registered medical practitioners in Australia, after allowing for multiple registrations and those who were overseas.

Most of these (92.3%) were in the medical labour force.

Of those currently working in medicine in 1999, nearly all (47,436 or 94.3%) were clinicians, comprising 20,966 primary care practitioners (44.2%), 17,091 specialists (36.0%), 4,740 hospital non-specialists (10.0%) and 4,640 specialists-in-training (9.8%).

The average age of medical practitioners was 47.7 years, and those in capital cities and other metropolitan areas were older on average (48.0 and 48.4 years, respectively), while those in remote areas were younger (42.3 years).

Employed practitioners worked 45.6 hours per week on average, and just under half (47%) worked 50 or more hours per week in 1999. Clinicians worked 42.0 hours per week, on average, in direct patient care.

Primary care practitioners worked 42.3 hours per week on average (47.7 hours per week for males and 32.3 for females). Their average hours increased steadily with increasing remoteness, from 41.2 hours per week in capital cities to 51.0 hours in remote areas.

Resident medical officers (RMOs) and interns worked longer hours than employed medical practitioners in general, with 62% working 50 hours or more per week in 1999.

There were 264.2 employed medical practitioners per 100,000 people in Australia in 1999, ranging from 333.1 per 100,000 in the ACT to 232.9 per 100,000 in Queensland.

Changes since 1995

There was a 6.3% growth in the number of employed medical practitioners and a 6.4% increase in the number of clinicians since 1995. By comparison, the Australian population rose by 4.7%.

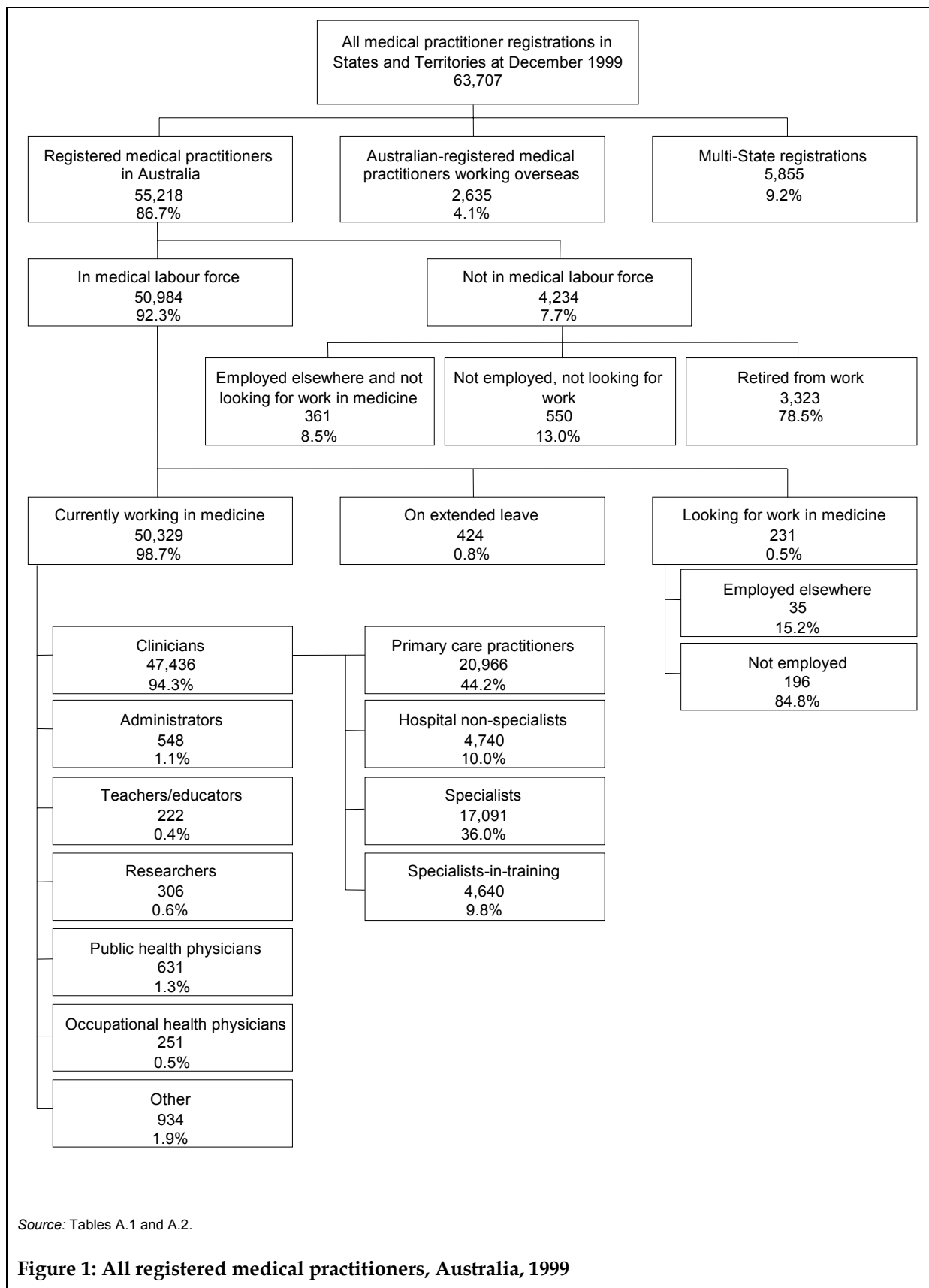
This resulted in a slight rise in the supply of medical practitioners from 260 per 100,000 people in 1995 to 264 per 100,000 in 1999.

The supply of medical practitioners rose in New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, and fell in the other States.

The supply of clinicians increased in all geographical regions – most of the growth occurred in large rural centres, where there was an increase from 240 to 265 per 100,000.

The proportion of employed medical practitioners who were female rose from 27.2% to 29.4%; the average age increased from 44.9 years to 46.0 years; and the average number of hours worked per week decreased from 48.2 to 45.6.

It is likely that these trends will continue because of increasing proportions of students commencing undergraduate medicine courses who are older and who are female.



Source: Tables A.1 and A.2.

Figure 1: All registered medical practitioners, Australia, 1999