

# Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL)

Melbourne Institute | Monash University

## Understanding the Dynamics of the Medical Workforce: The MABEL longitudinal survey of doctors

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### Abstract

- The MABEL survey aims to investigate the dynamics of the medical workforce in Australia.
- All Australian doctors were invited to participate in the first wave of the study in May 2008.
- Information is being collected about job satisfaction, job characteristics, family circumstances, income, and workforce participation.
- MABEL provides a new evidence base about Australian doctors' decision-making about work.

### Methods

- MABEL is a cohort study with annual waves of data collection. It has been funded for five years by a Health Services Research Grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council.
- The sampling frame for Wave 1 included all Australian doctors working in clinical roles, defined using the Australasian Medical Publishing Company's Medical Directory. Wave 1 was filled out by 10,498 doctors in 2008, just under 20% of the doctor population in Australia.
- Wave 2 was sent out in June 2009 to 14,986 doctors, including all 10,498 who responded to Wave 1 plus a 'top up' sample of 4,488 doctors new to the doctor population in 2009.
- Different versions of the survey questionnaire were created to tailor the content to four groups of doctors: general practitioners; specialists; specialists in training; and non-specialist hospital doctors.
- Data are collected on training, registration status, workplace and job characteristics, job satisfaction, family circumstances, and individual and household earnings. Wave 1 (2008) included a discrete choice experiment examines doctors' preferences and trade-offs for different types of jobs.
- Wave 2 (2009) included new questions on personality and a discrete choice experiment to rural GPs on the impact of different incentive packages on intentions to remain in rural and remote areas. Wave 3 (2010) includes new questions on locus of control and aggression and violence in the workplace.
- All doctors are mailed a personal invitation letter, a copy of the survey questionnaire and reply paid envelope, with an option of completing an online version. In Wave 1, around 25% of doctors chose to fill out the survey online.

### Working in collaboration

- The MABEL Policy Reference Group is comprised of key stakeholder representatives, to ensure that the questions investigated are relevant to current policy issues and decisions, and that the findings generated by the study are translated into the policy context.
- MABEL is endorsed by major medical professional organisations such as royal colleges, rural medical groups and medical educational agencies.

### Response rates

Response rate for Wave 1 (2008)

	Doctor type				
	All doctors	GP	Specialists	Hospital Non-specialist	Specialists in training
a) Total	54,750	22,137	19,579	8,820	4,214
b) Useable responses (with at least one question answered)	10,498	3,873	4,310	1,451	864
f) Not eligible (i.e. retired, no longer in clinical practice)	527	196	283	36	12
Response rate	19.36%	17.65%	22.34%	16.52%	20.56%

- Wave 1 respondents were broadly representative in terms of age, gender, geographic location, and hours worked, compared to all doctors in Australia. Further details are in Joyce et al (2010).
- Preliminary response rates for Wave 2 (2009) are 74.7% for those who responded in Wave 1, an attrition rate of 25.3%. For those in the top up sample, the response rate is 32.2%. The Wave 2 pilot survey indicated that these response rates are likely to rise to 81% and 42% respectively. Wave 3 (2010) will be distributed in June 2010.

### Selected publications and presentations

- Joyce CM, Scott A, Jeon S, Humphreys J, Kalb G, Witt J, Leahy A. The "Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL)" longitudinal survey—Protocol and baseline data for a prospective cohort study of Australian doctors' workforce participation. BMC Health Services Research, 2010 10:50. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/10/50>

### Papers in preparation

- Online, paper or mixed? A randomised trial and economic evaluation of the effect of response mode on response rate, response bias, and item non-response in a survey of doctors.
- Are doctors satisfied with their work? Results from the MABEL longitudinal survey of doctors.
- Getting doctors into the bush: preferences for rural location of General Practitioners.
- What influences the choice of specialty of young doctors? A discrete choice experiment.
- What factors influence the earnings of GPs and medical specialists in Australia?

### Conclusion

- MABEL is unique in medical workforce studies in Australia, and provides a new evidence base about Australian doctors' work-related decision making.
- This will assist in providing policy makers with important evidence to underpin future workforce planning, identifying effective policy levers for the medical workforce, and ultimately assisting to improve support for doctors.

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