



# *RACGP Definition of general practice*

General practice provides person centred, continuing, comprehensive and coordinated whole-person health care to individuals and families in their communities.

As a sector, general practice, its practice teams and their primary health care relationships comprise the foundations of an effective health care system. As a relationship based specialist medical discipline, general practice clinicians are defined by the characteristics of their discipline, which are:

**person centredness:** general practitioners understand that health, illness and disease are ultimately personal experiences, and that their principal role is to relieve personal dis-ease in all its forms, in the manner best suited to each individual. The patient's needs, values and desired health outcomes always remain central to the general practitioner's evaluation and management processes.

**continuity of care:** long term relationships build mutual knowledge, understanding, and trust: all essential elements in a therapeutic relationship which generates the potential for healing, empowerment and beneficial change. General practitioners seek to build health, wellbeing and resilience through the continuing patient-doctor relationship, application of best available evidence in the unique context of each consultation, and planned coordination of clinical teamwork, resources and services.

**comprehensiveness:** general practitioners are not limited by age, gender, body system, disease process or service site. The scope of clinical practice is challenging, spanning prevention, health promotion, early intervention for those at risk, and the management of acute, chronic and complex conditions within the practice population whether in the home, practice, health service, outreach clinic, hospital or community.

**whole person care:** appreciation of the interplay between bio-psycho-social contributors to health leads to a deep understanding of the whole person, and the ability to manage complex conditions and circumstances. The general practitioner functions as a physician, counsellor, advocate and agent of change for individuals, families and their communities.

**diagnostic and therapeutic skill:** general practitioners' high level diagnostic and therapeutic skills applied within continuing relationships deliver cost effective care that is highly valued by patients. General practitioners are skilled in managing uncertainty, undifferentiated illness and complexity, able to utilise best practice evidence in the light of individual circumstances, and engage patients and families in understanding, planning and managing their health according to individual capacities.

**coordination and clinical teamwork:** general practitioners work in close and respectful relationships to deliver accessible, integrated patient care: leading, supporting and coordinating their flexibly configured clinical teams; contributing appropriately to external clinical teams, and engaging with diverse specialists and other sector services according to individual patient or family needs. The general practitioner is increasingly the custodian of, and conduit for, key patient clinical information.

**continuing quality improvement:** general practitioners are able to assess their professional capabilities, expand existing skills and acquire new skills over a professional lifetime in response to changing clinical and community contexts. At the practice/service level, quality care requires leadership, teamwork, planning, systematic information management and continuing quality improvement processes to underpin delivery of care at every level.

**professional, clinical and ethical standards:** professional standards provide general practitioners with the essential framework for decision making in a complex environment where the ethical tensions between providing best possible care for individual patients, the cost effective utilisation of limited public resources and achieving equity for those most disadvantaged, must constantly be considered and resolved.

**leadership, advocacy and equity:** general practitioners understand the socio-economic and environmental determinants of health and the contribution made by other health professionals, sectors and community groups, resulting in collaboration, advocacy and leadership, influencing local environments to the benefit of individuals, families and communities, especially those most marginalised and at risk.

**continuing evolution of the discipline:** general practitioners contribute to the evolution of their discipline according to individual interests, skills and circumstances through diverse involvements in teaching, mentorship, research and local health service planning and service development, with all elements understood as being integral to clinical practice, quality care and continuation of a high quality workforce.

General practice is a unique discipline. Rigorous scientific medical training and the ability to apply the evidence appropriately in community settings, places general practice at the centre of an effective primary health care system. These same qualities – when combined with the discipline's holistic, relationship based philosophy and broad generalist practice, distinguish the discipline in large measure from other medical disciplines.

Every person needs a medical home in general practice where the provision of person centred, continuing care is based on the foundations of a relationship of trust between patients and their chosen general practitioner, while its consistent delivery rests with the practice or primary health care service as a whole.