



Australian Population Association

13th Biennial Conference

Population Policy and Australia's Destiny

5-8 December 2006 - University of Adelaide

The supply of doctors and nurses in Australia

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Debates continue in Australia regarding shortages of doctors and nurses, particularly in rural and remote areas, and the numbers that will be needed to meet expected future demands from an ageing population. The arguments are usually based on raw numbers required. A more refined measure (that takes into account the hours being worked by those in the workforce) to examine the supply side of the debate is the FTE rate (full-time equivalent numbers per 100,000 population). Such a measure for doctors and nurses is available from the ABS Labour Force Survey and the AIHW medical and nursing censuses. Both data sources have their strengths and limitations. The ABS data are more recent (2005) but because of sample size should be used mainly for national estimates. The AIHW data for 2004 provide measures of the supply of doctors and nurses at a regional level. This presentation will compare the two sources and estimate current supply, and also present data from 5 years earlier for recent trends in supply.