Dear Sir,

There is widespread concern about a shortage of doctors in the UK directly impacting frontline care, as demonstrated by the recent closure of Grantham and District Hospital A&E department in August 2016 outside of normal working hours. Retention of doctors has been highlighted as an important factor, with one recent BMA report finding that 46% of GP practices in England have GPs who were planning retirement, or leaving the NHS. Recruitment has also been cited as a significant issue. In response to this, the UK government has recently announced plans to substantially expand the number of doctors trained in the UK. They have proposed an increase in the number of newly qualified doctors graduating from medical schools from 6,000 to 7,500 per year by 2018. The details of how this increase will be implemented have not been announced so far.

In the UK, most entrants to medical school are school leavers and apply to undergraduate courses. However, applicants who already possess a degree may apply for accelerated graduate entry courses. These were introduced to the UK in 2000, but have been established in countries such as Australia and the USA for longer. There are currently thirteen UK medical schools offering the course, with the vast majority being four years in length, compared to five or six years on the undergraduate course. Despite the condensed nature, graduate entry students are required to meet the same requirements, as defined by the General Medical Council, as their undergraduate counterparts. There is emerging evidence in the UK and abroad that graduate entry students perform as well as their undergraduate colleagues, and even outperform them in certain areas (Calvert et al. 2009). Furthermore, research suggests that they are significantly more likely to complete their studies uninterrupted (Manning et al. 2009).

Graduate entry medicine courses currently account for around ten percent of all new doctors. We argue in favour of the expansion of graduate entry medicine to meet the current recruitment crisis based on the evidence that graduate entry courses produce equally-qualified doctors of the same standard, but more importantly at a quicker rate.
Keywords: graduate entry medicine

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Declarations

The author has declared that there are no conflicts of interest.

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