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Platform Presentation

What Health Science Students Learn About Indigenous Health

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Although comprising only 2.4% of the Australian population (ABS/AIHW 2003), the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders remains a national shame. Solutions to the problem are complex, requiring a multi-strategic approach.

There is an urgent need to increase the number of Indigenous health professionals. Current data shows that Indigenous adults are less likely than other adults in every State and Territory to be employed in health-related occupations (ABS 1999:76). Consequently, those responsible for the provision of health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are principally non-Indigenous health care workers. In 1991 the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody described this group as “generally are poorly informed about Aboriginal people, their cultural differences, their specific socio-economic circumstances and their recent history, resulting in culturally inappropriate care and treatment” (RCIADC 1991, volume 4:231).

A key mandate for universities, therefore, is not only to increase the recruitment of Indigenous students into the health professions but also to ensure that curricula across all professional courses in health addresses the cultural and historical realities underlying the current Indigenous health statistics. This workshop will bring together a number of academics currently teaching, developing curricula and researching Indigenous health across the College of Health Sciences.

Dr Kathleen Clapham (Yooroang Garang: School of Indigenous Health Studies) and Ms Jodie Kinchela (School of Public Health) will present the preliminary findings from a College funded qualitative research project (What Health Science Students Learn About Indigenous Health) that aims to identify the learning needs, experiences, attitudes and perceptions of students in health professional schools in the area of Indigenous health and to assess the extent to which this is a priority for students and teachers. Ms Kath Howey will review and discuss the processes and challenges involved in developing and implementing core units of study in Indigenous health for all undergraduate nursing students.

The major objectives of the workshop are:

- to raise awareness of issues in developing curriculum in Indigenous health to develop collaborative strategies that will take full advantage of the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics working across the College
- to develop innovative approaches to raising the cultural competence of all health practitioners.