A yarn about how Aboriginal academics are changing the future

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In 2015, Flinders Rural health SA (FRHSA) held a strategic planning day where it was overwhelmingly realised that there was a gap in our teaching and research team.

Despite great intent and effort FRHSA needed to do more to recruit and retain Aboriginal students into health professions. Consequently, the decision was made to employ rurally based Aboriginal Academics and Researchers from local communities into the FRSA teaching and research team. In September 2016 this vision became a reality when three Aboriginal people have been employed to provide education, support and mentorship to other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that is culturally safe and appropriate.

Bringing a plethora of skills, knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to their roles, all three staff members have a key role to play the future direction of FRHSA. New to the world of academia this journey has been a steep learning curve for the organisation and the new staff members.

This presentation will take you on a journey as you listen to the yarn that describes this experience.

The aims of the Aboriginal Health Team at FRHSA are to:

• ensure Aboriginal people can work together to better the lives of others
• ensure that an Aboriginal person can provide advice on our culture in a non-Aboriginal environment without sacrificing traditional sacred knowledge
• inform and prepare our emerging health professionals of the most culturally competent and respectful methods of treatment accepted by Aboriginal people is often underestimated in its value to both Aboriginal people and the health professional themselves.

What has been achieved in the short time since the Aboriginal health team have been employed?

• Introduced a cultural respect program in each region.
• Bought Aboriginal community service providers into our program to help our students get a better understanding of the issues happening in our communities today.
• Developing partnerships with schools, TAFE and local community to provide pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to enter University.
• The Advice of Elders is sought for greater understanding of connection to country and the importance of this to Aboriginal people and their health & well being
• Developing Aboriginal research advisory groups in each region to help guide the research students to acceptable research within the Aboriginal community, allowing greater transparency between the university research and the local communities.
Presenters

Donna Quinn, a proud Wiradjuri woman from rural New South Wales, currently holds the position of Associate Lecturer with Flinders Rural Health SA (FRHSA), based in Renmark, a rural town in the Riverland region of South Australia. Donna is part of a newly formed team of three Aboriginal academics, fondly referred to as the A Team. Donna holds a Master’s degree in Aboriginal Studies through the University of South Australia. Donna has a background in working in the education sector before taking up her role with Flinders University. Donna’s role with FRHSA involves engaging with schools and school programs to create an interest in medicine, mentoring Aboriginal students into medicine and throughout their journey as a medicine student, and raising awareness in culture through our newly developed cultural respect program. Donna’s position has so much potential but also requires, and provides, a wide variety of skillsets, empathy and compassion. It is a journey that she enjoys being a part of.

Doug Turner is an associate lecturer in Aboriginal health with the Flinders University Rural Health South Australia (FRHSA) and works from the FURSA Barossa Valley Campus facilities at Nuriootpa. Doug has a life time working and cultural knowledge of remote Aboriginal communities in the central regions of Australia. Doug’s earlier years were spent in the southern Flinders Ranges in South Australia on his mother’s country. Doug has a tertiary background in environmental management and secondary education, and Aboriginal community development. Doug’s current role with FRHSA is to seek out possible and achievable educational pathways for young Aboriginal students to develop a career within medicine or other health areas. Flinders University is seeking to encourage and support Aboriginal youth within our community to engage in study at Flinders to study medicine, nursing and allied health. Doug also teaches both the Flinders and Adelaide University medical students about the Aboriginal health issues in mainstream Australia. He also provides an Aboriginal cultural immersion experience for these students on country as well as tutorials relating to the importance of country and culture to Aboriginal health and wellbeing. Doug’s strong connection to the Aboriginal community supports the endeavours of FRHSA in achieving authentic and strong relationships with Aboriginal communities to build better health and research outcomes.