Improving cultural responsiveness of health professionals through education reform

Craig Dukes¹, Faye McMillan¹
¹Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Aim: To explore how the introduction of a nationally consistent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health curriculum framework into undergraduate health qualifications will improve the cultural responsiveness of Australia’s rural and remote allied health workforce.

Relevance: Our peak organisation for Indigenous allied health professionals asserts that a culturally responsive health workforce is imperative in order to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive the culturally safe health care required to improve health outcomes. We have strongly advocated for the development and implementation of a framework similar to the existing CDAMS Indigenous Health Curriculum Framework within allied health courses.

The medical profession’s CDAMS framework was endorsed by all the deans of medicine and has been included in the Australian Medical Council’s accreditation guidelines for basic medical education since 2006; requiring all medical schools to include core Indigenous health content in their medical curricula.

Approach: Our organisation has successfully argued for the development of a culturally inclusive, interdisciplinary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework to be integrated into tertiary entry level health profession training since our inception in 2009. Health Workforce Australia (HWA) is now funding its development.

Our organisation has laid the foundation for the development and implementation of a framework by establishing strong relationships with HWA, the Australian Council of Pro Vice-Chancellors and Deans of Health Sciences and other key stakeholders to ensure that the framework developed is implemented and embedded within health profession course accreditation. We believe education providers need to be held accountable for the cultural responsiveness of their health graduates.

Results: It is anticipated that health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be improved by health care delivered by health professionals who are better prepared to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All health profession graduates need to be both clinically competent and culturally responsive to affect positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes.

The implementation of the framework will facilitate a high standard of knowledge and competency within health profession graduates and set the benchmark for teaching the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health within all tertiary health profession courses.

Conclusions: This presentation will focus on the rationale for and progress of the development of a nationally consistent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health curriculum framework.