Footprints forward: moving on from the failure discourse to better Indigenous health workforce solutions

Marlene Drysdale, Monash University Department of Indigenous and Rural Health, Jacinta Elston, Faculty of Medicine, James Cook University

Footprints Team: Marlene Drysdale, Jacinta Elston, Lisa Jackson Pulver, Isabel Ellender, Susan Faulkner, Janice Chesters, Heather Kelly, David Sutherland, Leanne Turnbull, Rachelle Arkles, Sue Green, Helen Chambers, Phyll Dance, Jill Guthrie, Dennis McDermott, Cynthia Payne, Yvette Roe, Vicki Saunders, Sue Sutherland, Mark Wenitong

Background

The Footprint’s team from Monash University, James Cook University and the University of New South Wales conducted a project called ‘Footprints Forwards – Better strategies for the recruitment, retention and support of Indigenous medical students’. This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) under the Rural Undergraduate Support and Co-ordination (RUSC) Program. The Footprints project examined opportunities for the increased recruitment, retention and support of Indigenous students in medicine and other health careers.

A report from the Footprint’s project (Drysdale, Faulkner and Chesters (Eds) 2006) made eight recommendations. The recommendations included: setting up a nationally co-ordinated and collaborative approach including a medicine and health career advice clearing house, an increased universities’ focus on secondary school students and a recommendation that universities collaborate to share resources to increase the opportunity for Indigenous students of all ages and their families to attend and engage in career development programs, support for career development practitioners to improve outcomes through professional development, for university medical faculties to include Indigenous health as a core theme throughout their medical and health science curriculum, better resource allocation for Indigenous support units in universities to encourage more Indigenous students into and through medical and health science courses, a recommendation that universities should continually evaluate and monitor their Indigenous education policy, support and encouragement for mature age student entry and a recommendation for more research in this field.

Following the submission of the Footprints report a dissemination and implementation plan was invited and funded by DoHA. Part of the dissemination and implementation process included the workshopping of the Footprints recommendations with key stakeholders at the National Rural Health Alliance conference in Albury. Pre-workshop registration was restricted to 40 people and representatives from government, health professional bodies, Indigenous agency members and service providers, and universities attended.

Workshop methods

At the workshops participants were given a brief overview of the project and the recommendations. Participants were then divided into four facilitated groups. Each group discussed two of the eight report recommendations in depth. Details of the discussion were recorded on butcher’s paper. All groups reported back to the entire workshop. The workshop concluded with a showing of the Footprints DVD ‘You Can Do It’ and a summation by Jacinta and Marlene.
Workshop outcomes

The workshop endorsed the recommendations of the project and the value of the report and DVD. The participants recommended many ways to increase the number of Indigenous students in health courses, the provision of pathways leading to a health careers for Indigenous people and the strengthening of the Indigenous health workforce. A full discussion of the workshop suggestions, comments and outcomes will be developed and published as a peer reviewed paper in the near future.

The Footprint’s team wish to thank DoHA, the National Rural Health Alliance and workshop participants. A copy of the report and DVD can be requested from leanne.turnbull@med.monash.edu.au.