

Exploring the experience and needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and exploring domestic student attitudes to culturally diverse student and patient population groups among Master of Pharmacy, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Nursing students

Background

The Master of Pharmacy, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Nursing Programs at the University of Newcastle have begun phases of significant change in their approach to delivery and content. Changes are necessary as part of an evolutionary and quality improvement process for all Programs and have also become necessary for the Medical program with the establishment of the Joint Medical Program with the University of New England. Each of the programs include curricula of Indigenous health and concepts of cultural competency, as well as clinical communication skills which are central to learning throughout the courses. The courses include substantial cohorts of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students. As well as considering and accommodating the cultural and language needs of these students, it is important to ensure that domestic students are adequately equipped to deal with these needs among present and future CALD colleagues and patients.

Communication skills training for Pharmacy, Medicine, and Nursing students is currently undertaken in small group tutorials with trained actors as simulated patients. The attitudes of CALD students towards these communication skills sessions, and their confidence in participating in role-play scenarios has not been documented, but is expected to influence their assessment outcomes and confidence in interacting with patients in real-life situations. It is expected that language barriers and cultural concerns may also affect outcomes and participation for these students. The investigators are planning to develop an online learning and assessment tool to offer diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment activities which complement practical sessions. The tool is the focus of a recently submitted Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) grant application which involves a team of researchers from the Schools of Pharmacy, Medicine, and Nursing within the Faculty of Health at UoN, as well as the School of Pharmacy at the University of Tasmania. The information gathered in this project will help to inform the design of the tool and ensure that the specific language and cultural needs of all students are accommodated. This project is particularly relevant at this time as one of the strategic imperatives of the Faculty of Health is to increase the number of international students to 20 per cent of total enrolments. In 2009, the year one Pharmacy cohort (91 Students) includes an increase in international student numbers compared to previous years to 26 students, as well as a substantial number of students who have English as an additional language. Similarly in Medicine, 24 of the current Year 1 cohort (129 students) are International students. In Nursing just over a quarter of undergraduate students are immigrant, refugee or international students, and for 15 per cent of students, English is their second language. In 2009 46 CALD students enrolled. This poses additional challenges for teaching in terms of both language and cultural considerations. It is important to ensure that all students receive appropriate training and are given the opportunity to improve their English speaking skills in a culturally safe environment. The cultural differences and needs of these students must also be considered in relation to their impact upon their practice and their communication with colleagues and patients within the Australian Healthcare system. The 2008 Equity project 'Bridging the Gap' created a guide for tutors in preparing and assisting CALD students in clinical placements. This project will build on this by ensuring that the needs of these students are considered and incorporated into all aspects of the programs.

As well as this cultural diversity among students within the Programs, teaching about cultural diversity and dealing with the cultural needs of patients is a critical component of the Programs themselves. Efforts are currently being made to increase the Indigenous health and cultural-competency related content within individual courses and programs. These efforts would be enhanced by information about student's current level of knowledge in these areas and their attitudes towards approaching culturally diverse patients. This project will gather information to guide curriculum and approach changes which promote equity for all students; accommodating the needs of CALD students, and ensuring that domestic students are given the opportunity to develop an understanding of the cultural diversity of their fellow students and future patients.

Aims

1. To discover the specific needs of CALD students in Pharmacy, Medicine and Nursing in relation to language and cultural considerations.
2. To discover the attitudes of domestic students to the cultural issues faced among their peers and patients in order to inform cultural competency education within the Pharmacy, Medicine and Nursing curricula.

Research Design

CALD students will be invited to take part in small focus group sessions. Sessions will be semi-structured and designed to discuss the needs of these students and identify any considerations which should be made in curriculum design and approach to accommodate their language and cultural needs. CALD students will be given the opportunity to attend gender-specific or mixed sessions. Domestic students will also be invited to take part in separate sessions which will discuss their attitudes and knowledge about the cultural considerations necessary in dealing with their peers and future patients. All focus group sessions will be facilitated by experienced group facilitators who have no direct involvement with the current student cohorts. Focus group sessions will be held with a maximum of eight students in each group to maximise opportunity for participation and input. The sessions will run for approximately one hour. Participants will be asked a series of questions to stimulate discussion amongst the group which will be recorded for audio purposes and transcribing only. It will be emphasised that participation is entirely voluntary and will not affect their academic assessment.

Potential Value and Significance

This study will inform the design of an online learning and assessment tool to complement communications skills tutorial sessions in Pharmacy, Medicine and Nursing. It will also inform curriculum development and possible changes in the approach to clinical communication skills and cultural competency education for both student cohorts. It is expected that the information gathered through this project will enable changes which are likely to improve the student experience, and improve outcomes for both students and staff in the Pharmacy, Medicine and Nursing Programs. In particular, the study will generate information to ensure that the cultural and language needs of CALD students are met, and ensure that domestic students are adequately equipped to understand the cultural needs and differences among their colleagues and patients. Ultimately, this project will promote equity for all students within the programs.