

23 September 2009

'Closing the Gap' in Alice Springs

The Deans of Australia's medical schools will today meet a local Aboriginal elder with a deep understanding of traditional healing to improve understanding of Indigenous health issues among the country's trainee doctors.

The 18 Deans will meet Magdalene Hayes at the Todd River in Alice Springs ahead of the Medical Deans annual conference, which begins tomorrow.

Today's initiative, developed in partnership with the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, is designed to help the Deans better understand the nature and complexity of issues impacting on Indigenous health.

The Deans will also visit three health organisations at Alice Springs: Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Amoonguna and Tangentyere Council.

'Our job is to train the next generation of doctors across Australia,' said the President of Medical Deans of Australia and New Zealand, Professor Jim Angus.

'We believe it is essential that all young doctors know about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal health issues, and this opportunity will give us a first-hand understanding of Indigenous health culture and appreciate the importance of cultural awareness and cultural safety for young doctors,' he said.

Associate Professor Peter O'Mara, Acting President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, agreed: 'I think it is vitally important for the Medical Deans, as leaders in medical education, to meet Aboriginal people in their own environments and to experience Aboriginal culture, ways and knowledge. This is a significant step towards understanding Indigenous health, and thus Closing the Gap.'

'Through this cultural framework, the Deans are working towards 'Closing the Gap' in health outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians.'

Indigenous health is the only mandatory curriculum framework in every Australian medical course. Introduced in 2004, the curriculum framework includes areas such as Indigenous history, culture, population health, ethics and communications. 'This has been an extremely helpful framework for training young doctors,' Professor Angus said.

The Deans' two-day conference begins tomorrow and attendees will include Warren Snowdon, the federal member for Lingiari and Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery.

To interview Jim Angus contact Mary Solomon on: 0400 339 820

To interview Peter O'Mara please contact Dewi-Inala Zulkefli on: 0423 306 381