

# Letter to the editor: Medical deans are committed to student health and wellbeing

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

*Professor Richard Murray, President of Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, wants to assure students of the deep commitment medical deans have to promoting health wellbeing.*

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Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the article by Dr Ben Veness published in Medical Observer (16 November) '12 Things Medical Deans can do to improve student health'.

Medical students' health and wellbeing is a serious topic. The issues are complex and inter-related and all deserve thoughtful debate, respectful engagement and practical action. Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand and the Australian Medical Students' Association have a long history of such work and collaboration.

It is clear in the Australian Doctor article to which Dr Veness refers, that I was not promoting resilience as the solution to medical student wellbeing - nor that student selection holds the answer.

The purpose of my letter is to assure any students who may have read the article of the deep commitment that medical deans have to promoting medical student health and wellbeing.

One thing we certainly need to do is demand a respectful and supportive professional culture in medical education and clinical practice - for the good of students, doctors and most of all, our patients.

Medical Deans are on the record in asserting that all medical students deserve to study medicine free from bullying, fear and discrimination.

Universities and medical schools have clear policies on these matters and all provide confidential support and counselling services.

We have been part of ensuring a separation of student support from assessment decision-making as a condition of accreditation. And there are many local examples of successful innovation in promoting student wellbeing.

As an organisation, Medical Deans has demonstrated its commitment to action by:

- signing up to the “Statement of Agreed Principles on a Respectful Culture in Medicine”
- working with specialist colleges and health services to support a safe clinical training environment
- regularly meeting with the Australian Medical Students Association and inviting their participation in working groups and conferences
- sharing resources and best practice relating to the mental health and wellbeing of students.

There is of course much more to be done.

Which is why Medical Deans has established a working group on student health and wellbeing to apply and further develop the evidence-base for the strategies that work.

Other than safe and respectful learning environments, the considerations include optimising student selection, improving formal systems of student support, enabling peer support and developing students’ personal skills and insights.

We are also outspoken advocates for career and training pathways for graduates that are fair, transparent and aligned to priority community needs.

Studying to become a doctor is inherently demanding and medical schools take seriously their role to produce safe, capable and compassionate interns.

The teaching and the practice of medicine must always occur within a safe and respectful environment - for all those involved.

This demands honesty about what it takes and a willingness to work together.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Richard Murray**

**President, Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand**