

Medical students reap benefit from new pathology training model

An integrated approach to teaching pathology could contribute to solving the looming crisis of an ageing Australian pathology workforce, says leading educator, researcher and pathologist from the Pritzker School of Medicine at the University of Chicago, Professor Vinay Kumar, speaking to pathologists attending the Royal College of Pathologists of Australia (RCPA)'s Pathology Update in Melbourne this weekend.

Professor Kumar spoke on new approaches to teaching pathology within an integrated curriculum – an approach that was shown to have huge benefits for the teaching of medicine and patient care as a whole.

“This integrated learning model for pathology encourages medical students to become actively involved in the curriculum, which is crucial,” says Dr Kumar.

“Instead of sitting passively in large lecture theatres absorbing material, students come to small group forums ready for robust and informed discussion. This means they are proactively engaged in the learning process.

“Staff meet with students in these small groups to discuss what they have learnt and encourage them to continue further avenues of enquiry and learning,” says Dr Kumar.

Dr Kumar says the integrated curriculum model has resulted in an exponential increase in student satisfaction, engagement and involvement, significant improvements in performance and a twofold increase in the number of students choosing to study pathology.

President of the RCPA, Professor Paul McKenzie, says the pathology workforce is at crisis point in Australia and that the application of curriculum models that not only encourage more medical students to specialise in pathology is very important.

“Pathologists are indispensable to patient care in Australia, and without more trainee pathologists the health system could come to a halt.

“Elevating pathology learning within the existing medical curriculum would be a very positive step in enhancing the understanding the pathological basis of all disease for all medical professions,” says Professor McKenzie.

The integrated curriculum approach has been successfully implemented in universities across Europe and the United States and is currently being trialled by Monash University in Melbourne.

28th February 2010

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