



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Media Release

Leading medical specialists set to help close Indigenous gap

Leading Australian and international medical experts will convene in Darwin this month to help combat the Indigenous gap, address the barriers to healthcare services for Indigenous communities and promote cultural awareness.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), Australia's largest specialist medical college, will hold its annual Congress, this year with the theme *Take up the Challenge: Indigenous Health and Chronic Disease*.

The Congress will address a diverse range of health-related issues from an Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and New Zealand Māori perspective, focusing on addiction, new models of care of Aboriginal children and engaging with Indigenous communities.

RACP President Professor John Kolbe has heralded the Congress as a critical step in bringing together the foremost experts to address one of the most challenging issues facing Australia and New Zealand.

"Given the significance of Indigenous health in Australia and New Zealand, the College is meeting to promote ways to address inequity in health care and to close the gap for Indigenous communities in health," Professor Kolbe said.

"Indigenous health is one of the College's biggest priorities and we continue to focus on initiatives including the reduction of Indigenous disadvantage, by targeting life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and access to health services."

The Congress, to be attended by over 900 medical specialists, has attracted a high calibre of keynote speakers, including 2011 Queensland Australian of the Year Associate Professor Noel Hayman, Sir Mason Durie from Massey University, New Zealand and Professor David Simmons from the United Kingdom, who will speak to the issues of gaining the trust of Indigenous communities.

Despite major improvements since the 1970s, disparities in wellbeing between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous continue to exist.

In Australia, current figures suggest that Indigenous children are two-to-three times more likely to die before their first birthday than other Australian children while in New Zealand, Māori life expectancy is at least eight years less than that of a non-Māori.

Cultural and financial factors and distance have been established as key barriers limiting Indigenous access to mainstream services. Low levels of access by Indigenous people to primary health care settings and inadequate government funding contribute to their continuing poor health status.

Professor Kolbe said that increasing access to health services and building Indigenous control and participation in the delivery of health services is critical for meaningful change.

“Addressing the Indigenous gap requires the implementation of long-term strategies, recruiting and training doctors to work in an Indigenous setting and the engagement of community leaders to provide healthcare education and promote cultural awareness,” Professor Kolbe said.

The 2011 RACP Congress program offers an extensive range of workshops and plenary and concurrent sessions.

Key Congress sessions include ‘From clinical practice to academia and population health: Indigenous health and trust – hard to win, easy to lose’ with Professor Simons, ‘Indigenous dementia’ with Associate Professor Dina LoGuidice and ‘Chronic disease in the working population’ led by Associate Professor Tim Driscoll.

Addiction, meaningful rehabilitation of Indigenous people and engaging with Indigenous communities also feature as part of the robust Congress program.

The 2011 RACP Congress will be held in Darwin from 22 to 25 May, 2011

<http://www.racpcongress2011.com.au/>

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 13,500 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 5,000 trainees, across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 25 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental health medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au

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