

***For enhancing the delivery of culturally competent occupational therapy practice with Indigenous clients through the implementation of comprehensive, innovative and dynamic curriculum.***

**Overview of particular contribution and context**

Educating all Australian health professionals about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health has been on the national radar since the late 1980's when the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Report requested that tertiary institutions recognise the need for, and benefits of, culturally appropriate relevant academic content and clinical experience when designing courses for health professionals. NAHS recommendations were: 1) the inclusion of content about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and health, 2) the involvement of Indigenous people in the delivery of such content and 3) the engagement of academic staff in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander orientation and cross-cultural awareness programs.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce National Strategic Framework further mandated through Government the requirement to develop Indigenous curriculum for all health related courses; a movement which has already received much attention in the fields of Medicine and Nursing. Inclusion of Indigenous content in allied health programs has lagged behind; thus development of the Occupational Therapy (OT) curricula is a major priority. In 2007 the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health advocated "Promoting incorporation of cultural appropriateness and safety of assessment, referral and management protocols in clinical practice guidelines and training" as an immediate priority action. This action is adopted in the development of culturally safe health practitioners. James Cook University has established health professional programs, catering to the education of a culturally competent rural and remote workforce. As 38% of the Indigenous population is situated in rural and remote areas, it is important that the health professionals that serve these populations are appropriately educated.

Team members have previously undertaken research into the importance of the provision of undergraduate cultural competence education (see 'Impact' section for publications). Published literature by 'teaching team' members highlights that students who receive undergraduate education into the many health related issues experienced by Indigenous populations are more likely to become culturally competent health practitioners and therefore help to bridge the 'access' gap which exists between the health professions and Indigenous Australians (Gray & McPherson, 2005) .

Working since 2006, we have implemented the development of our curricula towards including culturally focused content. Firstly, we undertook a scoping study of all OT teaching staff to determine the current level of Indigenous content in our curricula and to find out how we can better equip staff to teach this content to our students in an integrated manner. Secondly, we worked in conjunction with the Indigenous Health Unit (led by A/Prof Elston) at JCU in the delivery of intensive student workshops that occur at the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> year and end of 4<sup>th</sup> year. These workshops focused on utilising a variety of teaching methods that enable students to engage with and experience Indigenous content and reflect on their own perceptions of working with Indigenous people (e.g. Self reflection activities, Education and History, Contact with Indigenous people). As a way of evaluating the success of these intensive workshops we undertook a pre and post survey and compared these results for each student and across the board. Results are presented later in this application and show the effectiveness of this teaching in achieving its goals of increasing students' desire to, and comfort levels with, work with Indigenous people. It is the intention of the 'teaching team' to integrate Indigenous content across the OT curricula. This pursuit will be enhanced by the 'teaching teams' initiative of focused staff cultural development workshops.

**Criterion 2: Development of curricula, resources and services that reflect a command of the field**

We have developed and presented coherent and imaginative resources for student learning. Discussions between the team of A/Prof. Elston, Ms. Thomas and Dr. Gray, facilitated the development, of a workshop to fit into the 4<sup>th</sup> year curriculum, which was intended to provide students with an introduction to the skills required for working with Indigenous people when they graduated as OTs. A/Prof. Elston arranged for academic and community Indigenous 'experts' to assist in this dedicated workshop. The OT 'teaching team' facilitated teaching in this block, from a professional perspective. Successful outcomes prompted the extension of the program into first year. The intensive workshops for 1<sup>st</sup>

and 4<sup>th</sup> year workshops have similar activities, the focus is different. For 1<sup>st</sup> year students we want them to begin to think critically about issues and to explore their own values. For 4<sup>th</sup> years, the professional practice learning component is foremost and is an important contribution to the exploration of ethical issues related to practice. In this workshop, culturally appropriate practice is discussed in relation to ethical principles. Students examine previous

experiences of working with Indigenous clients within health services from this standpoint and review the responsibilities of professionals to ensure culturally safe practice.

We have implemented research-led approaches to learning and teaching. Members of the teaching team have been

government and community roles she is well placed to facilitate the implementation of the model that stems from this teaching initiative at State, National and international levels. A/Prof Elston has been integral to the practical implementation of this teaching innovation.

Dr. Marion Gray is a Senior Lecturer in OT. She is currently 3<sup>rd</sup> year, honours, postgraduate and research co-ordinator. She completed her masters degree examining the issue of the development of cultural safety in OT in New Zealand and brings her passion for and experience in this topic to her teaching and research at JCU. Dr. Gray oversees the implementation of Indigenous content in the OT curricula and undertakes the research component of this teaching.

Ms. Yvonne Thomas is a Senior Lecturer in OT. She is 4<sup>th</sup> year co-ordinator and has been integral to the practical implementation of this teaching innovation at a 4<sup>th</sup> year level. Ms. Thomas has previously conducted research focussing on the experiences of remote Allied Health practitioners and on how occupational therapists work effectively with

OT at JCU is poised to become a national leader in this area of curricula development. This role is reflected in the interest already shown by fellow educators. To date professional dissemination has included the following:

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