



Medicine in Context: A Model for Community -Engaged Medical Education



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Greater Western Sydney (GWS) is Australia's 3rd largest economy and one of the most diverse regions in the country with significant socio-economic disadvantages and health disparities. Western Sydney University held extensive consultations during the inception of its School of Medicine (WSUSoM) to acknowledge the needs of local communities.

Community members voiced the need for WSUSoM graduates to know the lived realities of diverse GWS communities. As a result of these consultations, the WSUSoM (established in 2007) proudly carries a social accountability mission to improve the health of the GWS communities and other under-served regions in Australia. At the crux of WSUSoM's social accountability is partnerships with community organisations based on a strengths approach, focusing on how both parties could co-produce socially accountable doctors who will practice medicine with a strong understanding of patients' contexts. It was mutually agreed that WSUSoM would adopt a community-engaged learning philosophy which

is embodied throughout the 5-year Doctor of Medicine curriculum, led by a flagship program called Medicine in Context (MiC).

The MiC program is underpinned by the 'Four of Fours' framework for community engagement. The four MiC curriculum works (co-design, co-delivery, co-assessment, and co-evaluation) are undertaken collaboratively by four major stakeholders (academics, professional staff, students, and community partners) using Boyer's four scholarships (Discovery, Integration, Teaching & Learning, and Engagement) and underpinned by four core values (mutual benefit, mutual respect, ongoing partnerships, and shared recognition). MiC uses pedagogies of

spiral and experiential learning and uses innovative teaching methods to introduce medical students to Social Determinants of Health. MiC also emphasises the roles of community-based health and social services and how they intersect with clinical care in various settings; hence, putting 'medicine' in its broader 'context'. The program has two taglines: (1) medical practice does not exist in a vacuum, and (2) MiC competencies will make the difference between good doctors and great doctors. MiC students attend community placements across GWS, ranging between single-day exposures to 5-week placements. During placements, students become part of community teams and learn about patient-centred care through first-hand experiences and observations. Students' community learning is supported through on-campus workshops and tutorials delivered by a multicultural, multidisciplinary academic team.

Since its inception, the MiC program has partnered with 239 community organisations (and counting). The program runs 400 placement opportunities (11,200 hours) and 67 workshop sessions (134 hours) annually through in-kind contributions from community partners. In return, WSUSoM staff and students contribute in-kind to community projects including

joint community grant applications, health promotion materials, health checks and community service accreditation rounds. The strength of MiC's community engagement was evident in partnerships thriving through two major curriculum changes and strict COVID-19 restrictions. During the COVID pandemic the MiC team and community partners found innovative ways to maintain partnerships. Students were able to support their placement organisations through developing health resources, for example on the topic of autism and fact sheets for Medicare access for people with autism, to support the wider community.

MiC partnerships has resulted in a pedagogically robust, positively evaluated program. Feedback has been positive with students expressing appreciation of working within communities, with comments such as "[MiC] was an interesting way to see how community health is very centred on the demographics of the community itself, informed me of the holistic approach in treating patients (non-medical professionals are more necessary in some situations than doctors)." Students and alumni have demonstrated high level of competency in incorporating Social Determinants of Health in their clinical learning and practice. Together, GWS communities

and WSUSoM are achieving the joint mission of creating socially accountable, community-engaged doctors for those who need the best of care.

Reference

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