



Student wellbeing – we're not bulletproof!

◀ By Chantelle Ruoss
President of the Medical Students' Association of Notre Dame

It is a common misconception that medical professionals are perpetually healthy, when the stark reality is that not everyone is as bulletproof as public opinion would make out. In recent times, student wellbeing has become an increasing issue concerning both Junior Doctors and medical students. With time drawing closer towards exams, students place themselves under increasing pressure and stress as they strive to excel academically. Recent studies have indicated a high level of stress, anxiety and depression amongst medical students and Junior Doctors when compared to other academic disciplines. Most notably, a peak in anxiety has been shown to exist prior to exams, with depression escalating upon commencement of medical practice. With evidence that these patterns are prevalent, strategies must be put in place within medical schools in order to provide students with coping mechanisms that can be utilised throughout their studies and beyond. At Notre Dame, the nature of a postgraduate course presents a high intensity learning environment that can be unfamiliar and overwhelming. Many students must also overcome the challenges associated with moving interstate and leaving behind the comfort of family and friends. Such changes unquestionably require a period of adjustment. MSAND has endeavoured to ensure that commencing medical

school is an exciting occasion not over-shadowed by distress or concern. Our mentor program, introduced in 2008, aims to prepare new students by providing them with realistic expectations, understanding of the PBL process and a good dose of reassurance! The program is predominantly run by second year students for first year students, and has proven to be an invaluable tool in relieving initial anxieties, uncertainties and worries familiar to all first year medical students.

While first year presents as a challenging year, so too does the transition from pre-clinical to clinical study and the beginning of working life as an intern. Support must continue throughout this course of change and next year MSAND hopes to expand the mentor program to provide for students at all stages of study. Medicine is by no means an easy course of study to undertake. It requires dedication and commitment to education that does not cease beyond the medical school gates. The fast-paced, ever-changing and high stress nature of medicine creates continuous obstacles, both emotional and physical. For such reasons, the wellbeing of doctors at all stages of practice must be considered and supported.

All the best to the WA med students as we approach the end of the academic year. Enjoy a relaxing and well-deserved holiday!