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MED-E-SIM Webinar: Inspiring Australian Senior Secondary School Students to Careers in Healthcare During the COVID19 Global Pandemic

Globally, the shortage of healthcare workers is projected to be greater than 14.5 million in the year 2030. Similarly, Australia's health workforce shortage is projected to continue to increase exponentially, with a deficit of 109,500 nurses and 2,700 doctors by year 2025.

Research suggested that promoting awareness and interest is essential to guide academic and career pursuits. The authors have previously conducted a study demonstrating that MED-E-SIM, a one-day educational programme incorporating hands-on simulated learning, could help improve Australian senior secondary school students' decision in pursuing future study and career in health ($P < 0.001$).

In 2020, due to the COVID19 pandemic enforced lockdowns and social distancing restrictions, this has rendered the original MED-E-SIM programme to be cancelled and the likelihood of its delivery in 2021 (and beyond) remains uncertain.

Whilst social distancing and lockdown restrictions are essential and unavoidable new norms, the COVID19 pandemic also reaffirmed the alarming issue of healthcare workforce shortage. The challenge for health educators is to explore contactless learning experiences that can improve secondary students' understanding of healthcare and inspire them to pursue future study and career in the healthcare field.

Through a collaborative partnership between a Melbourne tertiary hospital and a Victoria regional secondary school, MED-E-SIM Webinar was successfully implemented during the COVID19 pandemic. Between June and August 2020, two MED-E-SIM Webinars were delivered to a total number of 43 enrolled year 12 secondary students.

MED-E-SIM Webinar is a health professional led webinar discussion forum aimed at inspiring senior secondary students in pursuing a healthcare career/further study. This webinar enabled students to converse with a diverse group of health professionals, ranging from entry to practice to specialty consultant levels. The multidisciplinary health expert panel helped the students to understand the meaning, value, challenge and reward in becoming a health professional. The panel also helped the students to identify the essential short-term and long-term goals.

In order to evaluate the impact of MED-E-SIM Webinar, participants were invited to complete the post-programme evaluation survey. Descriptive statistics (percentage and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test) were calculated and illustrated from questionnaire data.

This presentation reports on whether a health professional led webinar discussion can assist senior secondary students in relation to:

- Improved understanding about health professions; and
- Decision making process for their future study in health.

We recommend that MED-E-SIM Webinar can be a feasible online contactless educational strategy ($P = 0.001$) to increase young people's pursuit in health-related study/career.