

AAAPC presidents report 2016

I was honoured to accept the nomination as President of the Australasian Association of Academic Primary Care for a second year. What follows is my President's report for 2015/16 – it is taken from my oral report to the AAAPC Annual General Meeting in Canberra in June.

In a few short years AAAPC has changed from being a GP focussed organisation to one embracing primary care and incorporating NZ members. These major changes have coincided with some major external pressures on the primary care academic community.

All reading this would be aware about the dismantling of Australia's PHCRED strategy over the last 6 months. APHCRI was defunded from the end of 2015. PHCRIS has received a 6 month stay of execution after a decision for it not to be funded beyond June 30, 2016. Only one of APHCRI's Centres of Excellence will be functioning by mid 2017. Lack of Federal Government support has led to the closure of BEACH, the world's longest running study of general practice and the mothballing of AAAPC's own APCReN, the liaison organisation for 23 PBRNs in Australia.

These issues have dominated the activities of AAAPC during the last 12 months. We received considerable support from primary care professional colleges and from the North American Primary Care Research Group and the Society for Academic Primary Care, each of whom made representations of concern about the funding insecurity. Many others have rallied to the cause. We have liaised with the primary care colleges, gained media advice and presented our message in outlets including the *Canberra Times*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. Some members have used our briefing information material to assist with discussions with Members of Parliament, and their own media pieces, while the Australian Heads of Department of General Practice made a presentation to senior Federal Departmental staff.

As well as our lobbying, during the year we provided written submissions to the Senate Standing Committee on Chronic Disease Management and to the Medical Research Future Fund. The MRFF submission was important in that it seems likely that the MRFF is going to become a substantial source of future Australian research funding support. Our proposal (soon to be available on our website) advocates that an early priority of the MRFF be to rebuild the capacity of Australia's PHC research sector to help foster an evidence base for the delivery of high quality, equitable and accessible primary care. We prioritised investments in data, individual research capacity development and in Practice Based Research Networks.

During the year we consolidated arrangements for reciprocal conference awards with SAPC and NAPCRG. Our 2016 winners of both awards have been announced – Jennifer Walker for SAPC and Romy Gunnarssen for NAPCRG. Both awards will assist in the winners being able to present at the sponsor organisation's Annual Research Meeting.

AAAPC is faced with a couple of additional challenges as we transition from an organisation that was for many years focussed on Australian general practice. We need to make ourselves more relevant to our New Zealand members and begin to embrace other PHC disciplines. As such New Zealand membership on our executive has been expanded to 4 members.

One of the things that has become clear this year is that AAAPC has a unique and important position in Australian and New Zealand academic primary care. However I am not sure that our present structure is 'fit for purpose'. We need to make ourselves relevant to both NZ and to non clinician researchers and non GP primary care professionals, and importantly be able to shape rather than simply react to the changing environment in which we work.

AAAPC has a responsibility on behalf of our Australian and New Zealand primary care academic communities to meet our potential and manage the demands upon us. Hence I believe that its time to invest in a process of reflection for AAAPC. We need to grow our membership, transition into an organisation with a broader focus and become more efficient - for many years the burden of keeping AAAPC working falls on a very small number of people. As such, and as a clear outcome of the Annual General Meeting, we will be consulting members for their opinions prior to holding an all day face to face planning day later in the year. This will be preceded by a "survey monkey" type poll.

There are many people that keep AAAPC running as an organisation. Kitty Novy has been her usual enthusiastic tower of strength during the year, going far beyond the call of duty regularly. I am keen to acknowledge to optimism and hard work of NZ executive members Sue Pullen and Ngaire Kerse, both of whom have been patient in providing advice in a year dominated by Australian funding issues. In addition, I wanted to sincerely thank those on the Executive who have gone beyond the call - reviewing, helping draft submissions, presenting our case to politicians and their staff. Particular thanks go to Nick Zwar, Kirsty Douglas, Phyllis Lau, Sarah Larkins, Ellen Mc Intyre Dimity Pond and administrative staff of the University of Melbourne and Monash University.

Finally I wanted to send good wishes to our 2015 Treasurer Suzanne MacKenzie who has been seriously unwell. She has our warmest thoughts.



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