

RACS continues to strengthen PNGs medical workforce

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RACS will commence a new three-year program, in Lae with ANGAU Memorial Hospital and in Port Moresby with Port Moresby General Hospital and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences - University of Papua New Guinea. The tri-site *Papua New Guinea Clinical Support Program* (PNG CSP), made possible with funding from the Australian Government, is designed to promote training, education and leadership while nurturing the enduring ties between Australian and PNG clinicians, nurses and allied health personnel.

The program will offer the next generation of clinical leaders in Papua New Guinea opportunities to expand their professional and technical knowledge and skills, relevant to the health priorities of the Government of PNG.

RACS Councillor and orthopaedic surgeon, Ms Annette Holian, Chair of RACS' External Affairs Portfolio, said that one of the most important partnerships RACS has in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is with its medical workforce.

"RACS has been involved in providing specialist services and training in PNG for many years and today, Fellows continue to play a role of mentor, examiner and peer to PNG's medical and health personnel" Ms Holian said.

Under the new program of support, Australian, Pacific and New Zealand based clinicians will take on a coaching role and continue to act as mentors, teachers and trainers, to help develop a medical legacy for PNG through skills transfer to maintain and lift the clinical maturity already evident in the country. As with past RACS programs in PNG, the focus is not only on surgeons, but also anaesthetists, nurses, pathologists, physicians, and allied health professionals.

"The provision of Australasian-based scholarships and awards have helped to fill crucial gaps in the PNG health care system and have directly addressed the lack of specialists, including paediatric and cardiothoracic surgeons," she said.

RACS' Rowan Nicks Scholarship and Surgeons International Award, established in 1989 by the late Professor Richard Bennett, has assisted 72 medical personnel from low- and middle-income countries in the region with eight awardees coming from Papua New Guinea.

"The Surgeons International Award provides essential support, which allows PNG surgeons to undertake short-term training attachments and observerships in Australia, to gain the expertise needed to lift capability and the quality of care available in PNG," Ms Holian said.

RACS has supported PNG's tertiary sector with a focus on teaching and mentoring undergraduate and postgraduate medical students. Significant advances have been made in the medical education and

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training of PNG specialist surgeons through the development of the UPNG Masters of Medicine (MMed) Program.

RACS programs are operated with the understanding that a health system strengthening approach and model is needed to accelerate progress and contribute strongly towards Universal Health Coverage.

Ms Holian said that with such a high incidence of trauma injuries in PNG, providing training for medical and health care workers to improve their skills in managing trauma will be critical.

“Short courses delivered by RACS in the past have supported instructors for the country and have contributed greatly to building the capacity of health care workers to deliver care to the acutely injured,” she said.

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About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.
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