

# Brief Report: The Learning Partnerships Medical Education Program, 2012

Partnership between secondary school students and medical students from the Faculty of Medicine and Rural Health Academic Centre, University of Melbourne

Chief investigator: Associate Professor Helen Cahill  
Project Officer: Dr. Julia Coffey



*Learning Partnerships workshop with school students and medical students at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne*

## BACKGROUND

In semester two 2012, five 'Hands on HEADSS' Learning Partnerships workshops were run with fifth-year medical students from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Melbourne and students in years seven, eight, nine and ten from three Melbourne secondary schools.

The Learning Partnerships project was initiated by Associate Professor Helen Cahill, Deputy-director of the Youth Research Centre, and has been successfully used in since 2003. The program was developed in partnership with Associate Professor Lena Sancic, Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne, and Professor Susan Sawyer, Centre for Adolescent Health, University of Melbourne. In the Learning Partnerships project, tertiary students of medicine participate in a curriculum of shared workshops with classes of school students. The medical students use the HEADSS screening tool in simulated role-play scenarios with the school students, and in this address communication challenges akin to those they will encounter in workplace settings. They practice their skills in conducting a screening conversation with an adolescent patient

and received feedback from the adolescent actors who have role-played a character with a case story specially developed for this purpose.

## **PREPARATION**

School teachers and medical educators attended a training workshop run by Helen Cahill on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 2012. Teachers were equipped with lesson plans and activities designed to prepare them for the workshop with medical students. Role play and skills in giving formative feedback were the particular focus of school students' preparation. Over a number of preparatory sessions school students developed and rehearsed various role play scenarios, practiced formative feedback techniques, and discussed help-seeking strategies.



*Medical students delivering confidentiality statement*

## **WORKSHOP**

Between August and November 2012, seven Learning Partnerships workshops were run with medical students and school students (the period of data collection, supported by the CASS foundation).

Three workshops were run with students from Eltham College. These workshops took place at Eltham College, and were co-facilitated by drama teachers Evan Watts and Emma Oliver. The workshops were facilitated jointly with medical educators from the University of Melbourne. Dr. Alice Baker co-facilitated the first workshop; Dr. Michele Yeo and Dr. Michelle Telfer co-facilitated the second; and Dr. Michelle Telfer co-facilitated the third.

A fourth workshop involved students from Eltham High School. This workshop was run at the Royal Children's Hospital with medical students from the Melbourne Medical School. Eltham High School teachers Cindy Ahearn and Loren Clarke co-facilitated the workshop with medical educator Dr Lisa Barrow.



*Medical students practicing the HEADSS screen with patient 'Jo'*

Two workshops were also run in partnership with the Rural Health Academic Centre and Mooroopna Secondary College with year ten students from Kim Carter's drama class. One workshop took place in Wangaratta with medical students in the Wangaratta cohort, and medical educators Dr Ursula Reade and Dr Margi Cameron co-facilitated the workshop with Associate Professor Helen Cahill. Medical students from the Shepparton cohort took part in a second workshop, and this was co-facilitated by Dr Helen Malcolm and Dr Sue Harrison with Helen Cahill. Mooroopna secondary college students participated in both workshops, assisted by Kim Carter and Aileen Watson. Both workshops were filmed and photographed by Darryl McConnell and media students from Mooroopna Secondary College.

The final Learning Partnerships workshop took place with year seven and eight students from Preshil at the University of Melbourne. Fiona Martin from Preshil facilitated the workshop, supported by medical educator Dr Peter Azzopardi. Other Learning Partnerships workshops have been run with a school in rural Victoria and medical students from the Rural Health Academic Centre.

In the Learning Partnerships 'Hands on HEADSS' workshops, school students and medical students work together in participatory activities, small group discussion tasks and role exercises in order to discuss relevant issues. Workshop activities are designed to enhance the capacity of medical students to communicate effectively with adolescents about social and emotional issues which impact on health and wellbeing. School students are positioned as coaches and key informants. Topics covered include confidentiality, questioning techniques and the role of the doctor in supporting adolescents' health.



*'Fishbowl': a trio shows their role-play to the group, followed by group discussion, feedback and analysis*

## RESEARCH

The workshops have been the subject of a Melbourne University study (funded by the CASS foundation). Dr Julia Coffey, Youth Research Centre, has conducted interviews with school students, medical students, medical educators and teachers after the workshops. This data has shown that the workshops provide extremely positive learning outcomes for both medical students and school students.

The school students said that participating in the workshop was a 'great experience' in which they gained more confidence speaking to doctors. They also said they had gained knowledge around how and when to seek help for themselves and others. Many also had a sense that they had made a contribution to 'helping' the medical students to become better doctors.

*'As a teenager going to the doctor now, you know they're there to help you. You know they want to help you, so you just tell them what's wrong instead of trying to hide it.'* (School student 6, female)

*'It made me feel comfortable speaking to new people.'* (School student 2, male)

*'We learned it's hard being a doctor! Seeing a doctor is less daunting now, seeing them while they're still doing their studies...just having that experience learning to deal with doctors.'* (School student 5, female)

*'I liked giving them our advice, I think it made them happy. Because they only get that one chance to ask us what we think they should say.'* (School student 4, female)

*'They got a chance to try stuff that they probably couldn't do out in the field, you know. And they got to figure out what they're doing wrong.'* (School student 12, female)

*'We got a better understanding of how it would be for them to try and help us, and they were just really amazing people. They were really nice to us and made us feel comfortable to talk to a doctor.'* (School student 3, female)



*Trying out different questioning techniques*

A number of students said they felt they had learned skills alongside the doctors in the workshops:

*'If your friend needs help, you know what questions to ask. Like, to not push questions on them and slowly ask them what's wrong so they can tell you.'* (School student 2, male)

*'The stuff that the doctors learned we kind of learned as well, like how they were supposed to approach things and to think about how it's going to affect people. We think about what we're going to ask friends if we were the ones helping them for example. As a friend, we learned how to talk about it without making it too confronting.'* (School student 11, female)

*'It's really worthwhile. Any one else who gets the opportunity, do it!!'* (School student 8, male)



*School students giving medical students feedback at the Rural Health Academic Centre, Wangaratta*

Medical students described the face-to-face interaction with teenagers as being a great way of gaining experience and feedback in asking difficult questions in a 'safe' environment where it's 'ok to make mistakes', and where they can get feedback on their questioning styles from drama students playing the role of 'patient'.

*'It was excellent practice, learning to think on your feet, and learning different phrases. If they don't work, ask again, try something else...you couldn't do that with a real patient in a real situation.'* (Medical student 6, female)

*'I liked the feedback from students. I got told 'you probably need to smile more!' I don't think that's something a patient would tell me, I wouldn't get that feedback from anywhere else!'* (Medical student 14, male)

*'This was great! The workshop helps you understand your own strengths and weaknesses and focus on ways of improving the overall experience for both parties involved. It will definitely help with real life situations!'* (Medical student 15, female)

*'It's the subtleties that we learnt, little bits to learn how to be more sensitive about issues, and I think a lot of medical students needed those creases ironed out.'* (Medical student 20, female)

*'There are a wide variety of doctors with different cultural backgrounds and upbringings though in this course so, some are really hesitant talking about those topics, and people's comfort levels are really different. So I think this workshop is particularly important for them.'* (Medical student 18, female)

*'Please keep doing this program!'* (Medical student 4, male)



*School student in character as 'Jo' [left]; school student giving feedback out of role [right]*

The 'Hands On HEADSS' Learning Partnerships program has been operating with the University of Melbourne department of Paediatrics for over ten years and all medical students complete this workshop as part of their study in adolescent health. The medical students emphasised that they greatly valued the learning opportunity and it is recommended that efforts be made to extend the partnership between the Melbourne Medical School and other secondary schools in order to provide and extend opportunities for skills-building which is of reciprocal value for both the medical students and the adolescents.

The Education arm of the project involves a similar process in which classes of school students work with tertiary students training for entry to the teaching profession. These workshops are very highly appraised by both teacher trainees and school students. Opportunities will be sought to extend this aspect of the Learning Partnerships program.

Associate Professor Helen Cahill [h.cahill@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:h.cahill@unimelb.edu.au)  
and Dr. Julia Coffey [jecoffey@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:jecoffey@unimelb.edu.au)  
Youth Research Centre  
Graduate School of Education  
University of Melbourne.