

New Frontiers: collaboratively educating dentists to competently recognise domestic violence, respond and refer

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The presentation will report on a ground-breaking educational program that prepares student dentists to capably recognise domestic violence, respond and refer. Domestic violence is a significant public health issue that impacts not only on individual women, but also on their families and communities. The prevalence of domestic violence means that student dentists encounter traumatised women in their clinical practice. In 2015, student dentists identified that they were feeling inadequately prepared for this challenging role. JCU Dentistry, in collaboration with JCU Social Work and the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service, have designed and delivered an innovative program to address this problem. Students are required to participate in the scaffolded program Dentists and Domestic Violence – Recognise, Respond and Refer (DDV: RRR), which is integrated into their clinical practice.

The value of educating dentists to recognise, respond, refer and potentially reduce the incidence of domestic violence in regional and rural communities has not been explored previously. Involving dental students in the participatory action research projects that evaluate the DDV: RRR initiative has been integral to successful design and implementation. Preliminary findings show that both dental students' and graduates demonstrate the ability to capably apply the learning to their clinical practice. Evaluation is ongoing.

This program is at the forefront of dental education in Australia and is helping to bring Australian dentistry in line with other Western countries and allied health professionals. Interest from health professionals suggests that other dental programs would benefit from a similar collaborative initiative that enables appropriate responses to domestic violence in clinical practice. There is potential to embed Domestic Violence – Recognise, Respond and Refer (DDV: RRR) training into dental policy and practice more widely.