

AMA award winners do us proud

The Australian Medical Association National Conference has come and gone for another year, and this year's crop of award winners are outstanding members of the profession ...

DR Richard Harris, the Adelaide anaesthetist who played a crucial role in rescuing 12 Thai boys and their soccer coach from a flooded cave in 2018, won the prestigious AMA Gold Medal at the recent Australian Medical Association National Conference in Brisbane.

Dr Harris stayed with the 13 trapped people, assessing them medically and using his anaesthetic expertise to sedate the boys with ketamin, before divers, including his dive partner, veterinarian Dr Craig Challen, guided them unconscious through the treacherous cave system.

"A Thai Navy SEAL had already died during the dangerous mission, and Dr Harris and the other rescuers risked their lives to swim, walk, and crawl to reach the boys," said AMA president, Dr Tony Bartone.

"The priority of doctors is 'first, do no harm'. I can only imagine the range of emotions Dr Harris must have felt as he submerged that first unconscious boy to test the full-face mask that would be used in the operation.

"It took 3 days to bring all 12 boys and their coach out of the cave. With the world watching, Dr Harris was the last person out.

"Dr Harris is the 2019 Australian of the Year for South Australia, and the joint National Australian of the Year with Dr Challen. He has been awarded Australia's second-highest civilian bravery award, the Star of Courage (SC), the medal of the Order of Australia (OAM), and has been granted royal honours by the King of Thailand.

"Dr Richard Harris is truly a worthy winner of the AMA Gold Medal."

A Melbourne cardiologist who singlehandedly started an international movement to encourage doctors to openly discuss their mental

health struggles won the 2019 AMA President's Award.

Dr Geoff Toogood, a regular contributor to *InSight+*, the *MJA*'s weekly online news magazine, created #CrazySocks4Docs Day on the first Friday in June, and encouraged members of the health profession to share photos of their odd, crazy socks on social media.

"Dr Toogood is a most worthy recipient on the basis of his demonstrated commitment to, and advocacy for, doctors' health," Dr Tony Bartone said.

"Geoff speaks from a lived experience, and is a passionate and authentic advocate for the medical profession. He overcame significant mental health issues, with the support of his family, family GP, and other health providers.

"But on his return to work, he faced discrimination and unfounded speculation about the state of his mental health.

"As part of his recovery, he wore bright socks, and adopted a puppy. And, as anyone who has ever lived with a puppy knows, socks and pups are not a good mix. One day in 2016, his dog Sammy chewed one of his socks as he was on his way out the door to work. When Geoff grabbed another, non-matching sock and wore it to work, he became aware that his colleagues were laughing at him behind his back and whispering that he was 'going crazy again'.

"A simple question or chat would have cleared up the matter.

"Geoff decided it was time to break down the stigma and get people talking about mental illness in the medical profession. #CrazySocks4Docs is now a global



Dr Geoff Toogood, winner of the AMA President's Award.
Picture: Garry Sissons, Mornington Peninsula News

phenomenon, with doctors around the world donning odd socks.

"Geoff's message is that it is okay for doctors not to be okay, and that by talking openly about mental illness, depression and anxiety, we can empower our colleagues to seek help, or offer assistance."

Dr Rebecca Ryder, a senior obstetrics registrar at Sunshine Coast University Hospital, won the AMA Doctor in Training of the Year award, for developing her own training program for gynaecological surgery after returning to work from maternity leave.

"Dr Ryder has all the attributes of a great clinician and a great leader, with her commitment to learning, training, mentoring, and safe practice," said Dr Bartone. "Her colleagues, who nominated her for this award, describe her as a natural leader, as approachable, compassionate, sensible and decisive. Her template is now used to teach laparoscopic surgical skills to other junior trainees."

Dr Alan Leeb, a Perth GP who developed a surveillance program to actively monitor vaccine safety in real time, won the 2019 AMA Excellence in Healthcare Award.

"Perhaps his most important achievement is developing the

"As an individual, I can't change the world, but I can help to facilitate change in someone's life, and subsequently their wider community, by building a therapeutic, culturally safe relationship based on trust and mutual respect"

SmartVax tool, now used nationally, to deliver near real-time, active adverse event information to general practices and hospital immunisation clinics, and to prospectively monitor the safety of all vaccines given in Australia,” said Dr Bartone.

“Dr Leeb was motivated by the events of April 2010, when the use of seasonal trivalent influenza vaccine in children was abruptly suspended following an unanticipated spike in febrile convulsions and other adverse events after the use of Fluvax.

“Partnering with a software developer, Ian Peters, he developed SmartVax, a tool to actively monitor adverse events following immunisation (AEFI). SmartVax uses SMS and smartphone technology, and is a world leader in delivering active adverse event surveillance. The program has actively monitored almost 2 million vaccine antigens over 1.3 million immunisation encounters, and is in use at almost 300 practices and clinics across Australia.”

A Darwin medical student with a long term plan to work in remote Indigenous

communities in the Northern Territory was awarded the 2019 AMA Indigenous Medical Scholarship.

Nikki Kastellorizios, a second-year medical student in the Flinders University NT Medical Program and mother of three, says her aim is to become the kind of doctor she would want her family to encounter when they need medical attention.

Her passion for medicine stems from experiencing and witnessing the barriers and difficulties Indigenous people face when accessing health care.

“I am a registered nurse, and chose to become a doctor as I feel I will have greater influence in making real change towards closing the gap that Indigenous Australians — my people — currently experience,” Ms Kastellorizios said. “Through my encounters accessing health care, and acting as a support person for family members, I have recognised the profound impact people’s experiences have on their health choices.

“I recognise that as an individual, I can’t change the world, but I can help to facilitate

change in someone’s life, and subsequently their wider community, by building a therapeutic, culturally safe relationship based on trust and mutual respect.

“Post medical school, my 10-year plan is to work towards becoming a Fellow in my field, and to be the doctor I would want my family to encounter when needing medical help,” she said.

“My 15-year-plus plan is to work in rural and remote areas of the Northern Territory once my children are grown up. I also want to support and inspire other Indigenous people to become involved in the health sciences in whatever role they choose — health worker, nurse, doctor — to further empower families and communities.”

The Queensland Government’s groundbreaking introduction of the state’s first health promotion agency, Health and Wellbeing Queensland, won the 2019 AMA Best Public Health Initiative from a State or Territory Government Award.

Cate Swannell

doi: 10.5694/mja2.50271