

QUESTIONING MEDICAL EDUCATION

Medical education in Australia is now a matter of public concern as the depth of knowledge of medical graduates in basic sciences is questioned. Recently, *The Weekend Australian*, in their story "Doctors fail basic anatomy", reported that "Senior doctors claim teaching hours for anatomy have been slashed by 80 per cent in some medical schools to make way for 'touchy-feely' subjects such as 'cultural sensitivity', communication and ethics. The time devoted to other basic sciences — including biochemistry, physiology and pathology — has also been reduced." An accompanying editorial opined that "Medical schools are only the latest institutions to fall victim to postmodern academic fashions that ignore the basics in favour of the trendy and the politically correct." A subsequent report highlighted the concerns of Australasian clinical colleges about the downturn of basic medical sciences.

Despite this criticism and concern, deans of medicine were defiant, and the Australian Medical Council (which accredits our medical schools) remained strangely silent. The Chairman of the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools summarily dismissed the criticism as a "clash of cultures" within the profession and noted "I have never seen any evidence ... in any of our disciplines that would show we are deficient."

And this is the problem. There is no public evidence. There is no national assessment of knowledge in basic sciences or in any other medical domain; assessment is internal. There is no national comprehensive outline of course content; this is left to institutional judgements. Last year, when the "clash of cultures" emerged, the former Minister for Education established a steering committee to gather the evidence. Whether it will have the impact of the 1988 Doherty Report on medical education remains to be seen. The last thing we need is another talkfest producing a report for political archives and inaction.



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