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Editorial

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As paramedic practice in Australasia transitions toward professional registration, it is timely to examine the importance of developing a research culture within the profession. The benefits of a research culture may include improving patient care, and increasing in the paramedic professional image (1). Challenges possibly include the perception that performing research may be difficult in a time-critical environment (1) and the ambulance service culture, under a vocational in-house education and training model, may traditionally not have sought out new research opportunities or encouraged paramedics to undertake research studies.

The 'academisation' of the paramedic profession has subsequently resulted in a greater emphasis being placed in research. For example, the Council of Ambulance Authorities has created a research forum which facilitates research into ambulance operations and clinical practice (2). Furthermore, there are scholarships and incentive schemes offered by most Australasian ambulance services to encourage paramedics to engage in research. However, developing a National Ambulance Research Steering Group in Australasia may possibly further assist to develop a research culture. For example, in the United Kingdom, the National Ambulance Research Steering Group was formed to facilitate a strategic approach between ambulance services, professional bodies and university paramedic programs to further develop a research culture and increase capacity and capability for high-quality research (3).

The decision to implement undergraduate tertiary qualifications for new entrants to the profession in Australasia is also beginning to pay dividends with an increasing number of paramedics choosing to engage in research as well as postgraduate studies and higher degrees in research, which is a positive sign for the profession. As such, university paramedic programs are playing an important role in developing a research culture by placing an emphasis on research in the undergraduate course curriculum (4). The course curriculum is part of the paramedic professional socialisation process, and provides university paramedic students with the values, behaviours, knowledge and skills required to join the paramedic profession (5,6). By emphasising the importance of research to the profession during undergraduate studies, graduates are encouraged and prepared to engage in research during their paramedic careers.

Professional associations such as Paramedics Australasia (PA) are further encouraging the development of a research culture. In addition to its scientific agenda, PA provide an interface between the profession and university paramedic programs through organising student paramedic activities, such as the recent Student Paramedics Australasia (SPA) conference held at the Australian Catholic University Paramedic Program campus in North Sydney.

Poster abstracts are presented from the SPA conference in this issue of AJP, and can be categorised into themes addressing clinical, research and professional identity topics. In the clinical category, posters addressed topics such as hand dominance in external chest compressions (7), aeromedical aspects of paramedicine (8,9) chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (10) and inferoposterolateral myocardial infarction (11). In the research category, posters presented topics such as introducing student to research (12), identifying student attitudes toward research (13) and investigating how to get students involved in research (14). In the professional identity category, posters topics covered the transition to professional practice (15) and the development a professional student identity (16).

Today's students are the future paramedic leaders, educators and researchers (17). Through the quality of these poster presentations, it is clear that university paramedic programs, professional groups and the profession are working together with a common goal of developing a research culture. However, the engagement between universities, professional bodies and the profession may benefit further from a research steering group to strategically strengthen and consolidate an Australasian paramedic research culture.

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