Celebrating Indigenous health achievements

Thursday 7 May, 2015

Four surgeons were recognised today for their contributions to better Indigenous health outcomes today at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Annual Scientific Congress in Perth.

The inaugural Indigenous Health Medals are part of the College’s efforts to celebrate advancements which are helping to close the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Professor Harvey Coates AO is a senior ear nose and throat surgeon at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, and was largely responsible for establishing the neonatal hearing screening program in Western Australia.

Prof Harvey has published widely on treating and managing serous otitis media, a condition that affects the hearing of up to 90% of Indigenous children in remote communities.

Alice Springs Fellow Dr Ollapallil Jacob has been described as having ‘unsurpassed’ experience in all aspects of general and trauma surgery in Australia and New Zealand.

Despite a large surgical workload, teaching commitments and research, Dr Jacob has been a prominent advocate for Indigenous health in central Australia for the past 15 years. His data collection on severe dog bite injuries and political lobbying eventually led to the cull of camp dogs, following the death of two patients.

Professor Pat Alley, the Director of Clinical Training at Waitemata District Health Board and Clinical Associate Professor of Surgery at the University of Auckland, is a strong advocate for the bi-national focus of the College’s Indigenous Health Committee.

Prof Alley speaks Māori fluently, and has provided advice to several College Presidents about protocol and language at Māori ceremonial occasions. His knowledge has also encouraged trusting relationships with Māori patients and community groups.

Associate Professor Jonathan Koea is a highly accomplished general surgeon at Waitemata District Health Board and a Clinical Associate Professor of Surgery at the University of Auckland.

A/Prof Koea identifies with the Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama iwi (tribe) from Taranaki on the west coast of the North Island. He is an integral part of the New Zealand health sector and has advocated for changes and improvements to the quality of health services provided to Māori whānau (families) and communities.

To arrange an interview with any of the participants, please contact: A/Prof Kelvin Kong, RACS Indigenous Health Committee Chair on 0410 455 757