



**College of Intensive Care Medicine
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Unconscious bias – is it time to change?

Cultural safety is imperative. Medical Colleges have been asked to ensure that their members understand how unconscious bias grows out of a view of history. I encourage everyone to enjoy the wonderful films and books that describe these cultural differences and to reflect on how to make your units respectful and encompassing of Indigenous culture.

Australia is a multicultural country. We can freely talk about the advantages of diversity, we happily embrace the advantages of multiculturalism and we cringe at the thought of discrimination based on race or sexuality.

Now let us look at Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of the land, and the paradigm shifts - we start to get uncomfortable. The first thought is that we wish we could do more for Aboriginal people, we are glad we formally apologised even if there was some concern that it would be about compensation. However, it is not our business, we only look after a few Aboriginal people; we do not really know any Aboriginal people and the issues of the past belong in history. Modern Australia is vastly different from the past and it's good for everyone. We may even believe this if we do not spend too much time contemplating it.

However, we annually hear about Closing the Gap initiative. We are part of an Australia with an 11 -year gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Despite having one of the best health services in the world, we are the last amongst equals where it comes to Indigenous health. We are behind New Zealand, Canada and USA. Suddenly we must face the problem. The problem is not our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is us. We must come to terms with our reaping benefits sown in strife, nor with our receipt of a country ripe with opportunities from peoples who were forcibly colonised and who still suffer the effects of colonisation. The longer it is ignored, the worse the suffering of those who were colonised grows.

We are lucky we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people walk amongst us. Charles Darwin commented when meeting with Aboriginal people, how gentlemanly, respectful and helpful they were. Across the unimaginable diversity of cultures they represent, they were all quick to share their knowledge with those they encountered. The

Welcome to Country is a great example of generosity. Their knowledge of the land and how the country was gardened and preserved is remarkable when you contemplate how many farmers today struggle to survive off the land. It is clear these groups are worth interacting with - the art, music and film inspire us and makes us proud to be Australians. We have so much in common with our Indigenous brothers and sisters that we would benefit letting them more into our lives.

As a group in Intensive Care, we are used to advocating for the most vulnerable. We care about who we look after more than we do for ourselves. We are a group that can take this on well.

This pathway to equality is complex and fraught with trial and error. The endpoint feels for all of us difficult to obtain but this is an ongoing journey. We all just want a better future. We are in a place now where we have Indigenous doctors who can better negotiate this path for us. Let's make it easier for them to do so by making the medical system one that embraces Indigenous peoples' view.

Rather than debating on why you cannot climb Uluru or why Aboriginal people want to change Australia Day and the National Anthem, investigate Australian history and understand their view.

Over this Christmas break, I encourage you to read a book about Australian history from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander viewpoint, watch a movie or one of the wonderful Rachel Perkins TV series. Talk about it with your family, your kids will know more than you – that is a good thing. Let us do our part to make our hospitals more inviting so that health care is accessible and effective.

My challenge to you is to have a day where you look at the intensive care unit from the eyes of one of your Indigenous colleagues and see how many things in the unit represent colonisation. This may also be a reminder if you are developing your department's education program to include Indigenous and cultural literacy. When you look, please make sure you reflect and act. It is not good enough to be last amongst equals and to watch people die 11 years early.

Have a great Christmas and here is a reading and viewing list below. Thank you for being the colleagues I know you are.

Written by Dr Penny Stewart, Alice Springs

Any questions about this article and recommended list, you may email Penny at penny.stewart@nt.gov.au.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reading and viewing list

Historical based:

- Rabbit proof fence (F)
- The Tracker by Rolf de Heer by Phillip Noyce (F)
- Ten Canoes by Rolf de Heer (F)
- First Australians (TV)
- Women of the Sun (TV)
- Jandamarra's War by Mitch Torres (F)
- Mabo (TV)

Podcast:

- Wild Black Women

Comedy

- Basically black (TV-1973)
- Bran Nue Dae by Rachel Perkins (F)
- Black comedy (TV)
- The Sapphires by Wayne Blair (F)

Contemporary

- Mystery Road (TV)
- Redfern Now (TV)
- Samson and Delilah by Warwick Thornton (F)
- Total Control (TV)
- Bush Mechanic (TV)
- Jedda by Charles Chauvel (F)
- Sweet Country by Warwick Thornton (F)
- Charlie's Country by Rolf de Heer (F)
- Toomelah by Ivan Sen (F)
- Goldstone by Ivan Sen (F)
- Utopia by John Pilger (F)
- Chant of Jimmy blacksmith by Fred Schepisi (F)
- Walkabout by Nicolas Roeg (F)
- Rachel Perkins Boyle Lectures (TV)

Books:

- White out by Rosemary Neill
- Dark Emu, Young Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe
- Why warriors lie down and die by Richard Ian Trudgen

- unintended consequence by Noel Pearson
- Red, yellow, black road by Bruce Pascoe
- Aboriginal Australians: A history since 1788 by Richard Broome
- Growing up Aboriginal in Australia by Anita Heiss
- Biggest estate on Earth by Bill Gammage (excellent, the only secondary source for much of the primary sources)
- Forgotten War by Henry Reynolds
- Why Weren't We Told by Henry Reynolds
- An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History
- Carpentaria by Alexis Wright.
- The Secret River by Kate Grenville