



College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand

While the Covid-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc around the world, a renewed focus on an old problem has emerged, in western countries at least, related to black deaths and systemic, institutionalised racism. Widespread protests in our two countries and in other countries around the world provide testament to the centrality of this issue in western democracies. While it is possible that the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdowns and economic impacts have contributed to the volatility, there can be no doubt that at the heart of the protests is a clear recognition of the disadvantage and bias experienced by black and indigenous populations.

It is not always clear what the role of a medical college should be in situations such as we have witnessed in Australia and New Zealand. Clearly, from a medical perspective, we have legitimate concerns for a possible second wave epidemic as a consequence of the mass rallies. But equally clearly, it is essential that the College publicly re-affirms the commitments it has made to the principles of social justice and equitable access to healthcare for the indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand. Social disadvantage is a major determinant of poor health that cannot be offset or fully addressed through the healthcare system alone. Bridging the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous health outcomes is a responsibility of the entire society.

The College will continue to work through our Indigenous Health Committee with groups that represent the interests of the indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand. This will be a major focus of the College Strategic Plan to be renewed this year. The problems resulting in the adverse interactions between black and indigenous populations and police and correctional officers, the focus of the worldwide demonstrations, will not be resolved by legislation or law suits or guidelines or protocols but only by a more universal embracing of principles of mutual respect and social equity. We each need to do our bit and the College is committed to encouraging dialogue and developing processes to engender cultural safety for our indigenous trainees and cultural awareness among our members. And we will continue to address the broader social issues of racism, discrimination, unconscious bias and the need for diversity, within the workings of the College as well as the community.

Dr Raymond Raper AM
President

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