

Improving Medical Diagnosis Conference

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MIPS' focus on improving the education of our members and mitigating their exposure to adverse events in practice led us to attend and sponsor the 2022 Australian and New Zealand Affiliate of the Society to Improve Diagnosis in Medicine (ANZA-SIDM) conference. An impressive multidisciplinary group of healthcare professionals committed to making diagnosis safer joined us at the end of April.

Over two days, national and internationally renowned experts with a mix of strong academic backgrounds and healthcare leadership roles joined to discuss the theme Embracing Challenges and Change. The program showcased a curated selection of relevant topics to improve diagnosis with updated information about evolving best practices.

Associate Professor Julia Harrison (Monash University) and Professor Jill Klein (University of Melbourne) discussed how to "Cope with Errors", the reasons why mistakes in healthcare are inevitable and what a healthy personal response to errors in healthcare looks like.

Some explored ideas for consideration:

- A growth mindset attitude in clinical teams may positively influence how errors and their repercussions are disclosed, discussed, and learned. This culture shift can significantly reduce the blame dynamics that have traditionally occurred after mistakes.
- Healthcare professionals and their services are obliged to disclose errors from a legal and regulatory perspective openly, which is why creating a more positive, transparent and productive approach to the handling of errors is increasingly essential
- Turning inwards and focusing on the negative impacts of an error at a personal level is to be avoided. Practitioners are encouraged to identify and reflect upon the constructive lessons for future patient safety and quality of care.

Further insights into their research can be found [here](#)

Dr Mary Dahm (ANU) and Dr Sarah White (UNSW) presented "Analysing Communication: Explanation and Diagnosis in Interaction" focusing on how clinicians can analyse communication in patient interactions to inform training and in turn raise awareness of interpersonal communication in the diagnostic process.

Some of the concepts discussed included:

- Diagnostic errors can significantly cause distress and loss of trust in the doctor-patient relationship and contribute to clinician burnout (feeling exhausted, disconnected, and personally inadequate), especially for early-career practitioners.
- Clinicians regularly use 'diagnostic statements' to name, describe or explain the health problem to their patients. When facing uncertainty, clinicians are encouraged to share their "working diagnoses" and communicate their level of unsureness to the patient.
- The authors' research has found that clinical interactions with a diagnostic error have shorter history-taking periods, longer

diagnostic statements, and feature more evidence.

- Potential indicators of diagnostic accuracy are time spent on history-taking and diagnosis and using evidence-based diagnostic statements.

Further insights into their research can be found [here](#)

The positive impact of an accurate diagnosis and implications for your practice

The importance of shared decision making in the diagnostic process is very relevant when working within a diagnostic team. It encourages practitioners to view themselves as “ethical negotiators of meaning” with the responsibility of actively engaging their patients as co-producers of their own safer diagnoses.

By its very own nature, diagnostic error is a task where uncertainty is bound to be present at every step of the way. Thus, learning to acknowledge that diagnosis is complex and learning to embrace it as an iterative task that often requires multiple perspectives and opinions. This can alleviate the burden of its negative effect on patients and clinicians. Teamwork, effective communication, reassessment, timely reporting, and the development of preventative strategies were presented as helpful approaches to decrease vulnerability to diagnostic error.

MIPS offers a number of [resources on this topic](#) and encourages all members to explore these to elevate their level of diagnosis and alleviate the potential for error.

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