

Junior Doctor of the Year 2019 Dr Elise O'Connor



Dr Elise O'Connor is currently a postgraduate year two (PGY2) resident medical officer (RMO) at Royal Darwin Hospital, Darwin, Northern Territory. She studied at James Cook University, QLD. Outside her role as an NT RMO, Dr O'Connor is a co-ordinator for the Health Start Program. Healthy Start is a community program that helps promote health literacy to newly arrived refugees to Darwin, NT. The role includes organising workshops four times a year including multidisciplinary professionals including medical students, allied health and other medical staff volunteering their time to teach refugees about the Australian health system and other preventative health topics. Participation in the program helps health professionals and medical students gain an understanding of working with diverse cultures and language groups that builds confidence for all stakeholders to utilise interpreter services. Dr O'Connor is passionate about ensuring a patients understanding of the health care they are receiving that she facilitates 'working with interpreters' training sessions and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. These sessions designed aim is to raise awareness of the interpreter service and provides training to multidisciplinary professionals on when and who to use the services for in the hospital. These sessions were delivered as part of the health service commencement orientation programs for medical offers and departmental grand rounds across the Top End health service network.

Dr O'Connor commenced her health career in the NT as an Intern in 2018. Since commencing as an Intern in the NT Dr O'Connor achieved a rotation at Gove District Hospital, a regional 30 bed hospital located in the town of Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula of the Northern Territory. Gove District Hospital is the referral centre for 15 remote community clinics that refer patients to hospital for inpatient, outpatient and specialist care, and covers an area of approx. 41,000sq km. The east Arnhem region has few roads and limited road transport facilities during the dry season with all roads becoming impassable in the wet season. Causing the only way in or out is via air. Consequently health service delivery is challenged. One challenge facing the health staff apart from the distance from a major centre and weather considerations are the cultural differences and health language barrier with a majority of patients who call Gove District Hospital their own. Throughout her Intern rotation at Gove District Hospital in remote NT, Dr O'Connor grew her passion to contribute towards improving access to quality health care for Aboriginal communities. She also developed a good rapport with the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal health service providers such as the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. Dr O'Connor's passion has found her studying the aboriginal Yolngu language through Charles Darwin University and is always practising her learning into the hospital environment to improve the bond between herself and aboriginal patients to make them feel more accepted and comfortable in the daunting hospital environment.

Since working in the NT health service and particularly at Gove Dr O'Connor has been an advocate for the more effective use of interpreters for Aboriginal languages in NT health settings. A challenge that is always present in NT regional centres where there are large populations of aboriginal patients. Dr O'Connor has been instrumental in championing and facilitating 'working with interpreters' training sessions in consultation with the NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service to design and then deliver those training sessions. In collaboration with Gove District Hospital's Director of Medical Services, Dr O'Connor began a research project auditing the training being currently delivered for interpreter services for aboriginal languages. She was also part of the multi-organisational research project called '*Communicare*', which looks specifically at interpreter usage in hospitals and ways to increase uptake for patients and health professionals alike. Dr O'Connor has presented the progress of this project very recently at the 17th International Conference on Communication, Medicine and Ethics (COMET) in South Australia earlier this year.

The Northern Territory equivalent of the PMC, Prevocational Medical Assurance Services (PMAS) has found Dr O'Connor to be a driving force in contributing and participating as the secretary for the meetings by volunteering her time and knowledge for the NT Junior Medical Officer Forum (JMOF), which is not always recognised, as giving a lot of personal time and commitment in and out of meetings is required. She is an active member who always has new ideas of improving JMO wellbeing and education. Dr O'Connor is also the NT JMOF representative member on the PMAS committee and panels including representing the NT JMOF at a recent PMAS Governance Committee and the Prevocational Accreditation Panel for a recent accreditation matter. Dr O'Connor has undertaken the PMAS Surveyor training workshop and is looking forward to participating as the JMO representative surveyor on the next available NT prevocational accreditation survey event.

Dr O'Connor is dedicated to improving opportunities for education and training in rural and remote health in the NT. Dr O'Connor was one of the early Interns who were able to take advantage of the new opportunity to have a

General Rural Term (elective intern term) at Gove District Hospital. This was as a result of the Top End Health Service achieving the Australian Government funding for Rural Junior Doctor Training Innovation. This enabled her to widen her rural medical and professional knowledge and gained experience of working in a predominantly aboriginal patient centred health community.

Dr O'Connor continually demonstrates her commitment to the NT with her and her fiancé's love for a rural and remote health both plan to pursue rural medical jobs in the NT. Dr O'Connor has also taken part in the Top End Medical Society (TEMS) as their social representative, organising monthly social events for junior medical officers and had a large contribution to the organisation for the TEMS Ball supporting her interest in advocating for junior doctor health and wellbeing.