



## WELFARE SIG – TWO YEARS ON

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Two years ago the tide was beginning to slowly turn on welfare issues and their importance in the workplace, and for individual physicians. The results of the CICM survey on bullying and harassment had been released. Negative behaviours were being recognised as just that – negative. Work was being done to identify and quantify stressors in intensive care physicians’ lives. Recognition was growing that not only the nature of our work impacted on stress levels, but also the working environment.

The front cover of The Lancet at that time read: “Physicians, disillusioned by the productivity orientation of administrators and absence of affirmation for the values and relationships that sustain their sense of purpose, need enlightened leaders who recognize that medicine is a human endeavor and not an assembly line”<sup>1</sup>. Then in 2017, an amendment to the World Medical Association Declaration of Geneva was made, and included the pledge that as a medical practitioner, “I will attend to my own health, well-being and abilities....”

In 2016 the College approved the formation of the Welfare Special Interest Group. This group allows CICM Fellows with an interest in welfare to collaborate in developing College resources for the benefit of trainees and Fellows. The first meeting of the SiG was held in October 2016 and the following objective was discussed and ratified: **‘To advocate for the welfare of all intensive care doctors in Australia and New Zealand encompassing physical, psychological and professional wellbeing across the working life cycle’.**

As a group, we felt it important to reflect that welfare is an important part of the whole working life cycle. We also felt it necessary to reflect that it was not limited to psychological welfare, but also to physical and professional wellbeing. Our group began advocating for Welfare.

### **So what is a welfare advocate?**

Welfare issues are common in Intensive Care Medicine – for trainees and specialists alike. Welfare issues may affect patient care, clinical morale and retention, as well as impact the psychological and physical health of the individual. A welfare advocate can be someone that promotes and enhances welfare, health, wellbeing and resilience within Intensive Care Departments, and within the speciality of Intensive Care Medicine. Many units around Australia and New Zealand have a formal welfare advocate, other units choose a more informal approach.

A welfare advocate is the person in a department that is the most appropriate and willing specialist, ideally with an interest in welfare and wellbeing of specialists and trainees, and with a knowledge of welfare issues, resources, and relevant local, regional and national processes and policies. They are the ‘go to’ person for welfare related matters. It is important to note that whilst welfare advocates are approachable and empathetic, they do not have, and should not have, a therapeutic relationship with

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1. The Lancet, November 05 2016, Volume 388, Number 10057, p2209-2322, Edition 12

trainees and colleagues. They are a neutral, safe and confidential person to help with access to resources, processes and services. They promote welfare and wellbeing, and offer support, information and facilitation for specialists and trainees who encounter welfare issues.

Mentors and supervisors are different roles from welfare advocates. These are equally important roles to have within a department, but it is important to keep these distinct when possible. It is also ideal to separate the welfare advocate role from the Supervisor of Training and the Head of Department Role.

At all times, the welfare advocate must maintain duty to law, medical governance and the regulatory authorities. They must be aware of, and abide by, mandatory reporting requirements, including institutional policies and regulations. If a trainee or specialist is in danger of self harm, immediate action is required with appropriate psychiatric assistance.

In my department, I am the “go to” person for welfare issues. I guess, whilst not formalised, I am the Welfare Advocate. I am not the supervisor of training, I am not the head of department. I am merely someone with an interest in welfare issues, and who can provide a willing ear, a cup of tea (or coffee) and can point individuals towards helpful resources. I acknowledge the fact that I don’t have all the answers – at times I don’t have many of the answers, but I am happy to try and help find them with the individual.

Boundaries are important. And it is important to remember that I do not, and should not, have a therapeutic relationship in these situations. There are trained professionals that can help. My role is to help to find the right trained professional, if required.

CICM has recently partnered with Converge International. Whilst many employers have Employee Assistance Programs, sometimes individuals want to access help in another way. Converge International provide an independent service that is paid for by CICM. All you have to do is phone the toll free number (please see the end of the article) and provide some basic details (which are NOT provided to the college). You then get a phone call from a local counsellor to make an appointment as the start to the process. This service is available to all College Trainees and Fellows.

### **How can you get involved?**

Continue the conversation. Make welfare a priority. Start with your own and then reflect on the welfare of colleagues and trainees. Join the Welfare SIG. Read the updates in the CICM eNewsletters. Encourage course or conference convenors to include welfare related topics in the program. Include welfare related topics in departmental teaching. Become a Welfare Advocate in your department. Incorporate welfare related matters into your professional development.

### **Converge International contact information:**

**T** 1300 687 327 (Australia) | 0800 666 367 (New Zealand)  
**T** +61 3 8620 5300 (International)  
**E** [info@convergeintl.com.au](mailto:info@convergeintl.com.au)  
**W** [www.convergeinternational.com.au](http://www.convergeinternational.com.au)

**Interested in joining the Welfare SIG?**

Please email Stephanie Addamo - [stephaniea@cicm.org.au](mailto:stephaniea@cicm.org.au)



*\*Inaugural meeting of Welfare SIG Dinosaurs cannot exist in the modern world. We need to learn to adapt or change our environment in order to survive and thrive.*