

## Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM)

### Annual Report from the President – Dr Beata Maria Byok

4 May 2020

The AFOEM AMM has been postponed and will, for the first time because of COVID-19 be presented via webinar at a future time with the date to be advised. The Chairs of the Policy and Advocacy and Education Committees will present their annual reports at a future meeting. The Annual Report 2019-2020 marks the conclusion of my Presidency effective 4 May 2020.

These are unusual times, as prior to this meeting we would normally have had the RACP Convocation at which I would have the pleasure of personally welcoming new Fellows into the Faculty. Although I cannot meet you face to face, but with no less pride and excitement, I extend my warmest congratulations to you. New Fellows will be invited to the Convocation Ceremony in 2021 to be personally welcomed by the AFOEM President.

The world including Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, has changed dramatically in the past two months. COVID-19 dominates all aspects of our lives and although we are apart, we are not alone. The impact on healthcare workers, including our colleagues and their families and loved ones, has been overwhelming. I hope that you and your loved ones remain well.

During this time, the skills and expertise of occupational physicians are being called on to manage and advocate on behalf of healthcare and emergency workers and the workforce in general.

The pandemic has caused a marked increase in the workload of our peak committees in Policy and Advocacy and Education. On behalf of AFOEM and myself, I want to say thank you to all the members of these committees who have and continue to contribute during these extraordinary times.

As always, the activities and achievements of the past twelve months, as detailed below, have been a team effort regionally and nationally.

#### **The future**

I warmly welcome Professor Malcolm Sim to the office of AFOEM President.

Malcolm, I pass on to you the trust of our membership to listen to and act in their best interests and to continue our mission of being:

*“...recognised as the leading authority on occupational and environmental medicine (OEM) in the Australasian region and will strive towards an education, assessment and oversight program recognised nationally and internationally as providing the highest standards in OEM demonstrably met by its trainees and Fellows.”*

and to provide evidence based best practice care for our workforce and by extension community.

I handover a strong, talented, enthusiastic, passionate and hard-working team of colleagues from whom I have learnt a lot and been privileged to work with as President.



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Malcolm, I wish you, together with President-Elect Dr Warren Harrex, every success for the future. I believe that our Faculty and the College both gain by having a mutually collaborative and mature relationship that recognises each other's strengths and value.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### ***AFOEM - Council and Committees***

I acknowledge and thank all the members of:

- AFOEM Council
- Faculty Education Committee - Chair Dr Alison Drewry
- Faculty Assessment Committee – Chair Dr Andrew Lingwood
- Faculty Training Committee – Chairs Dr Armand Casolin
- Faculty Policy and Advocacy Committee – Chair Dr Warren Harrex
- Regional Committees

Council members who have stepped down or are stepping down at the end of their terms, are Dr Dominic Yong (Victoria), Dr Michael Lucas (WA), Dr David Fitzgerald (ACT) and Dr Graeme Edwards (Queensland). I extend my thanks to them for their involvement and contributions to our Faculty during their terms of office.

Dr Warren Harrex will step down as Chair of Policy and Advocacy as he has completed his term but has a new role as incoming President-elect of AFOEM.

### ***Council members***

I congratulate and welcome the new members of Council:

- Dr Andrea James (Victoria)

Those continuing on Council are:

- Professor Malcolm Sim as President
- Dr Warren Harrex as President-Elect
- Dr Alison Drewry (Chair Education)
- Dr Helen McArdle (Tasmania)
- Dr Sandra McBurnie (NSW)
- Dr Alexandra Muthu (Aotearoa New Zealand)
- Dr Josh Munn (SA)
- Dr Amy Bright (WA Trainee representative).

### ***Faculty and College staff***

Thank you to all the Faculty and College staff in administration, education, policy and advocacy for their outstanding work and support in helping AFOEM to achieve its goals.

- Lisa Penlington - Director Member Services
- Joanne Goldrick - Manager, Faculties
- Lucie Perrissel-Taggart (previous) and Megan Chard (previous) and Lisa Helson - Executive Officer
- Claire Celia - Senior Policy Officer

### ***The AFOEM President's Awards***

The awards acknowledge the outstanding contributions of three of our colleagues. I am delighted to announce that the recipients for 2020 are:

- Dr Andrea James, for Education, Training and Assessment
- Associate Professor Peter Connaughton for Policy & Advocacy
- Dr Amy Bright for Trainee Commitment.

Congratulations to each of them for their leadership and for being role models in the Faculty.

### ***Queen's Birthday 2019 Honours List.***

Congratulations to two of our Fellows whose service and dedication to occupational and environmental medicine was recognised in the Queen's Birthday 2019 Honour List.

- Professor Malcolm Sim, Member of the Order of Australia (AM)
- Dr Chris Cunneen, Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

### **FUTURE OF THE FACULTY'S REPORT**

An initial meeting occurred between the three Faculty Presidents, on 30 July 2019, to discuss the practical implementation of the Public Health document '*Report of the AFPHM Future of the Faculty Working Group*', 31 July 2017. Duane Findlay (CEO) and Lisa Penlington (Director, Member Services) attended the meeting. Three key areas covered were policy and advocacy, resourcing/budget and training and support to trainees and supervisors.

AFOEM has been agile and well supported by the College in its advocacy roles, which was well demonstrated in AFOEM's response to the epidemic of accelerated silicosis. A meeting between the Chair of the College Education Committee (CEC), Professor John Wilson and the three Faculty Presidents and the respective Faculty Education Chairs took place on 11 February 2020. The Faculty Presidents were able to explain the unique requirements of each Faculty's training program and to ask for the provision of appropriate levels of resourcing and support. Staff provided information on budgetary processes. The Finance and Risk Committee approves budgets before they are presented to the Board who have the final say. The Faculty Presidents spoke to the need to have greater visibility and input into the budget and the need for discretionary spending, within budgetary limits, to allow for flexibility and to resource work plans.

More work remains to be done by the incoming leadership team to build on these initial discussions.

## **POLICY AND ADVOCACY**

### ***COVID-19***

The Faculty Policy and Advocacy Committee (FPAC) has had a very busy year, now augmented by the emergence of COVID-19. In the wake of COVID-19 they have responded to members' requests, from within the Faculty and across the College, for guidance material on a range of workplace issues. This has led to the development of several COVID-19 guidance documents:

- Occupational physicians providing advice to employers on COVID-19
- Pregnant healthcare workers

- Vulnerable healthcare workers
- Appropriate selection and use of PPE
- Return to work after COVID-19 infection.

Some of these documents are in the development phase and will be available on the AFOEM website once they have been endorsed by the College COVID-19 Expert Clinical Reference Group and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPCC).

Dr Warren Harrex is the AFOEM representative on the RACP COVID-19 Expert Clinical Reference Group. A multi-speciality group of College members who meet weekly to advise on matters in the areas of education, policy and advocacy, operational factors, ongoing College activities such as meetings, clinical exams, impact on College workforce and responding to official Government advice.

A media release on 6 April 2020, '*RACP says facemasks must be conserved for frontline health workers*', was co-signed by the RACP President Associate Professor Mark Lane and myself as AFOEM President.

### **Projects**

Despite COVID-19, FPAC continues to address requests from a variety of organisations, insurers, regulators and government bodies for input and/or endorsement. Ongoing projects, some of which have been temporarily suspended while COVID-19 matters take precedence are.

- Medically Unexplained Symptoms Working Group (Led by Dr David Beaumont)
- *It pays to care - Bringing evidence informed practice to work injury schemes for the benefit of workers and their workplaces* discussion paper and advocacy strategy (Led by Dr Mary Wyatt).

### **Safe Work Australia**

A formal liaison has been established between AFOEM and Safe Work Australia (SWA). Ms Jackii Shepherd Director, Safe Work Australia accepted an invitation to attend the FPAC meeting on 6 March 2020. Our two organisations now have the opportunity to work together to provide input, evaluate and assist with implementation on common interest areas including but not limited to workplace exposures to hazardous materials e.g silica and coal dust, Safe Work Australia's National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030, and aspects of workers compensation.

### **Accelerated silicosis**

After the Federal election last year, the Government fulfilled its pledge to form a National Dust Disease Taskforce (NDDT) which is chaired by the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer Professor Brendan Murphy. Dr Graeme Edwards FAFOEM is one of the independent expert members who sits on the Taskforce. The NDDT will inform a national approach to ensure systems are in place to protect Australians who are at risk from occupational dust disease.

The RACP hosted a National Dust Disease Taskforce workshop on '*Nationally consistent guidelines for the health assessment of workers associated with the engineered stone industry*', on Thursday 19 March 2020. RACP/AFOEM will ensure that the momentum gained by the work of the Taskforce and the establishment of a national registry is not lost during the COVID-19 crisis.



AFOEM Lead Fellows Group including participants from TSANZ and other stakeholder Colleges continue to meet monthly, to provide regional feedback, discuss developments and next steps which has included the AFOEM President writing letters to relevant government Ministers to raise ongoing concerns.

Dr Alexandra Muthu has been instrumental in driving a multi stakeholder response to Accelerated Silicosis in Aotearoa New Zealand, initiated at a forum held on 6 June 2019 that agreed to form an Occupational Dust Diseases Taskforce.

### ***Health Benefits of Good Work (HBGW)***

There is ongoing uptake and application of the HBGW message. I attended and presented at an industry Forum in Darwin in June 2019. Forums for 2020 are on hold due to COVID-19.

Trademarking of the Health Benefits of Good Work campaign name and associated assets is progressing. This will mitigate reputational and governance risks associated with the use of the HBGW logo and reference to HBGW.

The HBGW Executive maintains regular communication with the SSG Executive i.e. the signatories to the Health Benefits of Good Work Consensus Statement, who put the principles of 'good work' into practice.

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

A letter co-signed by the three Faculty Presidents was sent to the College Education Committee (CEC) outlining the unique requirements of their respective Faculty and asking for greater representation on the CEC, (at present there is only one Faculty position on CEC, the current representative is from the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine), and to request dedicated faculty support and resources to progress Advanced Curricula Renewal for faculty specific program needs.

The response to our letter was:

- The CEC denied our request to have a representative from each of the Faculty's sit on the CEC.
- The CEC endorsed recommendations to:
  - circulate CEC agenda papers to the two Faculty Education Committee Chairs that are not CEC members
  - Invite non-sitting FEC chairs to send written comments on agenda items to the CEC either via email or via the sitting Faculty Education Chair.
  - when appropriate, invite the FEC Chairs who are not CEC members to a CEC meeting to participate in relevant discussions.

On 11 February 2020, the three Faculty Presidents, and the three Chairs of the Faculty Education Committees (FECs) met with Professor John Wilson Chair CEC and Ms Robyn Burley Director, Education, Learning and Assessment. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the response from CEC. It acknowledged there are common values across the College but there are also Faculty specific requirements in non-hospital based training for Public Health and OEM and to ask that this be taken into consideration in the Advanced Training Curricula Renewal program

Professor John Wilson reassured the meeting that our concerns were noted, and the College has the capacity to achieve College as well as Faculty specific needs. The specifics on how



this will be implemented are yet to be determined and require ongoing communication and discussion between the FEC and CEC.

I deeply regret the disruption COVID-19 has had on training and assessment for our registrars. Recommendations were made to the COVID-19 Examinations Advisory Group by the AFOEM Faculty Assessment Committee, after consultation with AFOEM Council.

The recommendation to postpone all 2020 AFOEM exams until 2021 was approved by the College Education Committee and is in line with other postponements across the College. A communiqué went out to trainees, Training Program Directors and supervisors, informing them of the decision. Trainees are urged to maintain close contact with their supervisors and to regularly check the RACP/AFOEM website for information. Be reassured that as more information becomes available you will be given at least three months notice, or more where possible, of the rescheduled exams.

The Annual Training Meeting (ATM) has been cancelled, but the Faculty will explore the possibility of delivering some of the presentations via an online platform. I thank the ATM organising committee, chaired by Dr Robyn McBeth, for all their hard work.

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### ***Kevin Sleigh Memorial Lecture: 19 August 2019***

I attended the inaugural Kevin Sleigh Memorial Lecture on 19 August 2019 at the RACP offices in Melbourne. The lecture is an annual memorial organised by the Victorian Regional Committee to recognise the high regard and respect that members of AFOEM, ANZSOM and WorkSafe Victoria have for Kevin as a friend, colleague and mentor. Present on the evening were Kevin's family. The lecture was titled *Through the looking glass – return to work in mental health from different perspectives*. The presenters were Dr Dielle Felman, psychiatrist, Dr Andrea James, occupational physician and Mr Mark Belanti, psychologist.

### ***AFOEM marketing and advocacy toolkit***

The AFOEM Council approved *Value Proposition and Narrative document* was uploaded to the AFOEM website as a marketing and advocacy toolkit at the beginning of 2020. It contains a customisable PDF brochure and PowerPoint presentation that introduces the Faculty, explains our specialty's purpose and contains a template letter with our Fellowship mark. I encourage you to use these tools as part of your individual advocacy efforts on behalf of occupational and environmental medicine.

### ***ANZSOM***

The inaugural ANZSOM Annual Scientific Meeting, with AFOEM as a scientific program partner was held in Adelaide in October 2019. The meeting was the most successful conference held by ANZSOM, on several fronts, with accolades for the scientific program. Congratulations to the South Australian - Adelaide ANZSOM/AFOEM organising committee.

Collaboration between AFOEM and ANZSOM continues with an ANZSOM representative on AFOEM Council and the initiation of executive leadership meetings between the respective bodies.



### **Congress 2020**

A big thank you to the organising committee, chaired by Dr Amanda Silcock, AFOEM stream Congress 2020. They had compiled and finalised an exciting and interesting program prior to COVID-19 striking. All that hard work will not be in vain as some of the program will be presented online later in the year. One of these is the combined AFOEM and AFRM session: *Promoting an inclusive community for people living with disability*. Dr Amanda Silcock will continue as the AFOEM Congress lead for 2021-2022.

### **Regions**

Regional visits conducted in the second half of 2019 were to meet the regional committees in NSW and WA. Concerns were raised at the lack of industry and community knowledge as to what an occupational and environmental physician is or does, the underutilisation of OEM skills, and how to better engage mid-career members in Faculty activities particularly taking on leadership roles and participating in education and training.

I received criticism from some members regarding an article by Dr Graham Wright (SA Committee) published in the AFOEM eBulletin in May 2019. The article painted a rather gloomy picture for the future of OEM. Nevertheless, I felt that as a Faculty we are open to hear alternate views and to open debate. I am happy to say that the article did just that with counter opinions, also published in the eBulletin, urging us to be adaptable and innovative and to identify and grasp emerging opportunities.

I look forward to reading more interesting articles from the membership. The eBulletin is there for two-way communication not just for information transfer from your Executive.

### **International**

AFOEM has a long-standing relationship with the Hong Kong College of Community Medicine (HKCCM). At the invitation of Dr Thomas Tsang President of HKCCM I was a speaker at their Annual Scientific meeting on 27 September 2019 held in Hong Kong.

Associate Professor Peter Connaughton continues to represent AFOEM on the International Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative (IOMSC) Executive as Secretary/Treasurer. The IOMSC has representatives from 43 countries. The IOMSC's *Declaration and Statement of Principles on Health Care Professionals' Health and Wellbeing* was recently endorsed by AFOEM and RACP.

### **Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance (MHWA)**

*"The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance (the Alliance) brings together business unions, the mental health sector and regulators to promote mentally healthy workplaces."*

As occupational physicians we know that the workplace is crucial in the prevention of mental illness and helps people recover when they are unwell. AFOEM Council agreed to become a member of the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance. Associate Professor Peter Connaughton is AFOEM's representative.

### **RACP Physician Health and Wellbeing Reference Group**

RACP Physician Health and Wellbeing Reference Group (PHWRG), which reports to the Board, has myself as Chair and Associate Professor Peter Connaughton as the AFOEM representative. The reference group has completed the Physician Health and Wellbeing



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Strategy that integrates existing wellbeing activities with new initiatives. The action areas focus on strengthening the College culture and operations through five key objectives: Leadership, Education, Standards and Accreditation, Advocacy and Adding Value. Underpinning the Strategy is a separate implementation plan governed by the PHWRG which allocates tasks and resources and develops timelines for achievement.

Dear Fellows and trainees; in comparison to the rest of the College, we are small in numbers, but in passion, voice and effectiveness we are giants!

**Dr Beata Maria Byok**  
**AFOEM President**  
**4 May 2020**