



ANU's Dean of Medicine calls for more women specialists

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Australia's medical specialist colleges need to recognise that women are still under represented in their ranks and must do more to encourage women to pursue medical specialist training, according to Professor Imogen Mitchell, Dean of Medicine at the Australian National University.

Professor Mitchell, a senior staff specialist in intensive care medicine at Canberra Hospital, is a keynote speaker for "Leaning in: encouraging women in the medical world" at an anaesthesia and perioperative medicine conference in Melbourne today (FRIDAY).

"With women now making up 50 per cent of medical school graduates there may not appear to be a problem and while at my own university a lot of us (in the senior faculty) are women, in hospital departments the leading positions are still pretty much male and it's still a big problem," she said.

Professor Mitchell will present statistics showing the proportion of women who are fellows of some of Australia and New Zealand's leading medical colleges.

At the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) 32 per cent of fellows are women, the College of Intensive Care Medicine has 22 per cent of fellows who are women while the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has 12 per cent. The medical colleges are responsible for training, examination and specialist accreditation.

ANZCA has had four consecutive women presidents from 2008-2016. ANZCA's current Vice-President is Dr Vanessa Beavis and the Dean of the college's Faculty of Pain Medicine is Dr Meredith Craigie.

The college's Gender Equity Working Group promotes the importance of equal representation of women and men across the fellowship and increasing women in leadership and management positions.

Professor Mitchell noted that five of Australia and New Zealand's 22 university medical deans are women.

"The biggest problem for women who want to practise medicine and start specialist training is still 'when should I have children' or 'how do I juggle family and work life' so medical colleges need to be proactive and offer more flexible training opportunities for women," she said.

"It was only four years ago that I was told by a senior specialist that perhaps women were not cut out for intensive care medicine. Thankfully, many specialist colleges are recognising that they play an important role in facilitating change to ensure there is parity between men and women becoming fellows in their colleges and the need to talk more openly about this as an issue."

The meeting will hear how in the UK, despite near equal numbers of men and women in the UK medical workforce over 75 per cent of complaints that have been escalated to the UK governing body, the General Medical Council, are for male doctors.

Professor Mitchell will be joined by visiting US speaker Professor BobbieJean Sweitzer, Professor of anaesthesiology and director of perioperative medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago for the session.

“Women make up 50 per cent of medical school graduates. But women’s career advancement is slower, they are paid less are less likely to hold leadership positions, be full professors, or department chairs,” according to Professor Sweitzer.

“Medicine has an opportunity to mirror the private and educational sectors by embracing the international United Nations Women’s movement #HeforShe, encouraging male leader leaders to champion gender equity.”

More than 500 delegates are attending the annual Australasian Perioperative symposium “Measuring, Managing and Minimising Risk” at Melbourne’s Grand Hyatt Hotel from October 25-27.