



9 May 2023

Museum's oral history project draws on doctors' COVID-19 experiences

Doctors on the global frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic are being asked to record their experiences as oral histories for an Australian museum audio archive.

The Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History in Melbourne developed the project after hearing reports from anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians working in hospitals in Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

The award-winning museum is managed by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), one of Australia's largest specialist medical colleges. The museum showcases more than 170 years of advances in anaesthesia and pain medicine and is one of the largest and most diverse collections of its type in the world.

The museum has organised a 1950s caravan that has been refitted as a mobile sound recording studio for the project which will be launched at the ANZCA Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) in Sydney on Saturday 6 May.

"Matilda" the caravan will be housed on site at the International Convention Centre with the archive gathering team headed by museum curator Monica Cronin. She is encouraging many of the 1700-plus delegates at the meeting to step inside the caravan and share their experiences of working, and living, in the pandemic by recording short audio segments.

The recordings will then be collated and stored by the museum as a digital archive and for display as a resource in future exhibitions.

"This archive will help us and future generations better understand the personal experiences of our medical specialists, including anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians," she explains.

"One of the great difficulties in studying, understanding and interpreting the 1918 flu pandemic has been that records weren't deliberately amassed and kept. So this is a great opportunity to capture these personal recollections now, while they are still fresh."

Ms Cronin says the audio archive and other items already collected including digital posters, N95 masks, tweets and printed guidelines on personal cleaning procedures for

hospital staff will be useful – not only for understanding the context in which anaesthetists and pain medicine specialists have been working, but for future pandemic planning.

ANZCA President Dr Chris Cokis says it is important that the voices and pandemic reflections of medical specialists including anaesthetists are preserved for scholars and the wider community.

“These short oral histories will enrich and enhance our understanding of what it was like to be on the hospital frontline from 2020 to the present. So many anaesthetists and other specialists and allied health professionals were thrust into the unknown by the pandemic and this project will help us better understand their experiences.”

The ANZCA ASM from 5-9 May draws anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians from Australia, New Zealand, the US, the UK, Ireland, Israel, Germany, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

ANZCA is responsible for the training, examination and specialist accreditation of anaesthetists and pain medicine specialists and for the standards of clinical practice in Australia and New Zealand.

Link: <https://www.geoffreykayemuseum.org.au/>

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