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GPS SHOULD PROMOTE POLICY RELEVANT RESEARCH: EXPERT

Primary health care research is not good at promoting itself as being a “sexy” field, unlike hospital care which relies on new technology and multi-million dollar investment to sell its story, according to an international GP visiting Australia this week.

Speaking at a primary care research conference in Sydney today, Professor Chris van Weel, President-Elect of the World Organization of Family Doctors, said policy research struggled to promote itself to politicians and the public because it was “important but not sexy”.

“And we’re not very good at promoting ourselves,” he said.

If GPs want to claims about health reform to be taken seriously, they needed to be involved in research affecting policy, Professor van Weel said.

“The message we have to get out is that the research we do leads to safer health care and low health care costs,” he says.

Also a Visiting Fellow with the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute based at ANU, Professor van Weel is passionate about GP involvement in research. He sees an increase in the number of GPs undertaking research as a key goal of his presidential term.

“People with practical medical experience should be part of research teams, they bring years of experience working with patients and the system to the research which can only enhance it.”

In his General Practice Department at Radboud University in The Netherlands, medical students can complete PhD studies in a research field while doing their medical degree.

Professor van Weel said this gives the student an early introduction to medical research, and builds a strong base for GP leaders of the future.

“The program means students are doing ground-breaking work in asthma and heart disease, they recognise the impact their research has and take that into their practising careers.”

His view was endorsed by GP and APHCRI Director Professor Nicholas Glasgow.

“It’ a hard sell to politicians and in some cases, to GPs themselves, but policy advisors tell us they want more evidence to base policy decisions on and we think GPs have a big role to play in that work,” Professor Glasgow said.

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