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GP'S SHOULD LEAD CHRONIC DISEASE FIGHT: TOP DOCTOR

Doctors should be seizing the opportunity to lead the fight against chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease, according to the next head of the international organisation for GPs.

Professor Chris van Weel, a GP and expert in chronic disease management, said that GPs should be capitalising on their role in the prevention of chronic disease and the subsequent savings to health systems.

"General practice needs to stop complaining that nobody likes us. Rather, we should get on and take up a leadership role in reducing the potential for chronic illness to become a disastrous health issue. They will be able to apply the growing disease-oriented knowledge base to patients and their individual needs. GPs can and will play an important role in ensuring the world is a healthier and happier place."

Professor van Weel, from the Netherlands, will take up his role as President of the World Organization of Family Doctors/GPs (WONCA) in July. A Visiting Fellow at the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) based at the ANU, Professor van Weel, will deliver a public lecture *Excellence in General Practice: An international challenge*.

In his lecture, Professor van Weel suggests that more GPs should undertake academic research in both policy and clinical disciplines, employing the practical experiences of the surgery to a research context.

"If GPs are doing research in the prevention and treatment of illnesses their patients have, then I believe patients will have a better experience of the health system."

Professor van Weel said Australian general practice was already setting down this path, and had become a world leader in enhancing research connections between GPs and academics.

The Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute, based at ANU, supports a number of GP researchers who are looking at chronic diseases, including diabetes, chronic illness management and respiratory illnesses.

GP and Director of the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) based at ANU, Professor Nicholas Glasgow, said that the combination of practice and research contributed balance to the debate about the role of general practice in the health system.

"The practical experience of working in general practice can be very different to what policy advisers or people in full-time academic work imagine. The amount of practical knowledge GPs bring to research is invaluable," Professor Glasgow said.

More information and interviews:

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