

Prof. Christine Dennis: caring for yourself first

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Expert introduction

Christine Dennis, Ba Nursing, Masters HSM, Doctorate of Business, FCHSM, FAAQHC, is the CEO of Australian Council Healthcare Standards.

Christine Dennis has worked in the health industry since 1976, having commenced in nursing and progressed to leadership positions in nursing and then broader health service management.

Recent positions have included CEO Southern Adelaide Local Health Network; Chief Operating Officer, Top End Health Service; and, acting CE Northern Territory Health. Her career has included many and varied positions both within Health Services and in Health Departments. She also worked as Manager of the State Coroner's Office in South Australia and, has provided education and training consultancies within Australia and internationally. Areas of expertise include strategic and operational planning, quality and safety systems, and organizational change.

Editor's note

On Oct. 29, the 2017 International Green Healthcare Forum was successfully held in Shenzhen, China. With the presence of prestigious local and foreign experts from fields of hospital management and health policy, the meeting was dedicated to providing insightful and comprehensive speeches on healthcare reform and medical workforce training.

During the conference, Associate Prof. Dennis, deeply impressed all the attendees with her brilliant presentation on the topic "*Quality, Safety and Accreditation in Asia Pacific Region from the perspective of ACHS*". Taking this opportunity, the Editorial Office of *Journal of Hospital Management and Health Policy* conducted an interview with Prof. Dennis and invited her to share her experience in the field of Healthcare Standards (*Figure 1*).



Figure 1 Photo with Prof. Christine Dennis.

Interview topics

Q1. *As we know, you are CEO of Australian Council Healthcare Standards. Would you like to give a brief introduction about it?*

ACHS is an accreditation agency established in 1974 and provides a role similar to other international accreditation agencies that you might be aware of like the Joint Commission International (JCI), Accreditation Canada and also similar to your Three-A accreditation system in China. The ACHS was the first organization in Australia to develop standards that applied across the entire health care organization. Its standards are recognized and implemented worldwide.

Q2. *Today you will give a presentation on the topic "Quality, Safety and Accreditation in Asia Pacific Region from the perspective of ACHS", would you like to summarize your main points to us?*

The first part of my presentation is an overview of ACHS.



Figure 2 Professor Christine Dennis: caring for yourself first (1). Available online: <http://www.asvide.com/articles/1848>

The second of my presentation, I will talk about the ‘green’ standards within the accreditation product because, of course, the theme of this forum is green healthcare. By ‘green standards’, I mean those standards that look at environmental sustainability, and look at how health services consider their footprint on the planet, including how do they manage toxic waste, how do they better utilize their water resources, how do they ensure they have facilities that are designed to maximize natural light, fresh air and those sorts of elements that are really supportive to a good healing environment. Research has shown that natural light, natural ventilation and access to gardens and green space can have a positive impact on mental health and, can also enhance recovery from illness. Therefore, it is important to introduce those elements of design back into hospitals.

Q3. Would you like to talk about the current status of health services in your country?

Australia’s healthcare system is performing well from global perspective. We have universal access to health services. People can choose to go into the public health system, or they can purchase private insurance to cover all or some of the costs of their health care in the private sector.

Recently, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published their 2017 comparative analysis of healthcare systems (*Mirror, Mirror 2017*). A set of criteria, including patient care, equity, access, efficiency and health outcome, etc., are used to measure the quality of health care in the 11 OECD countries.

I am very proud to say that Australia actually came second, behind UK. The domain in which Australia did

very well was ‘health outcomes’, in which we ranked first. This is not just examining how the health system ensures access to health services, or how does it deliver care, but what does that care actually result in—are we making a difference. Does it result in the improved health status of our population? Because ultimately this is the aim of providing healthcare—to improve the health and wellbeing of our people. We also have good life expectancy in Australia but when we look at the *Mirror, Mirror* report, we will find that we did not perform well in the field of equity. And that is largely reflective of the fact that we have problems in terms of the equity of access to health services for people live in rural and remote areas and significant challenges in terms of closing the gap related to the life expectancy of our indigenous population as compared to the non-indigenous. Australia is a large country with a relatively small population and most of the people live within 50 km of the coastal regions, which means access to care for people in rural and remote Australia is much more problematic than in metropolitan areas. We know that we have to do better in terms of delivering healthcare to people who live in remote areas and also improve the health and wellbeing of our indigenous population.

Q4. Any advice for medical students?

The problem that has emerged, or is finally being spoken about in recent years, is that medical staff are not taking care of their own health needs. Long hours and a heavy workload, stresses of work and study, balancing work and personal responsibilities, burnout, and many more factors that contribute to health issues among doctors. Medical students, in fact all people that work in health, have to look after their health—both physical and mental health. Take time to enjoy the fresh air and look after yourself if you want to be looking after others.

Let’s enjoy the video (*Figure 2*)!

Interview with Christine Dennis: caring for yourself first. Available online: <https://youtu.be/eBXLyEnI4YQ>.

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(Science Editor: Julia Wang, JHMHP, jhmhp@amegroups.com)