Well-informed, sharp and heading for graduation

PRACTITIONERS who have supervised Flinders University optometry students on clinical placements at more than 50 sites nationwide speak highly of the students’ skills.

The first 16 optometrists are due to graduate from the course this year.

Students and optometrists interviewed by Australian Optometry found the placements were invaluable with many students suggesting the experience had changed them towards rural practice and independent practice.

Flinders University Foundation Chair of Optometry and Vision Science, Professor Konrad Pesudovs, said the training methods were designed to produce quality graduates.

‘I keep receiving communication from optometrists who are encountering our students on placement and are so impressed with their abilities that they feel compelled to write to me,’ he said.

The students have six to nine-week placements in the final 18 months of the five-year Bachelor of Medical Science (Vision Science)/Master of Optometry course. At least one placement is spent in each of the following settings: corporate, independent, metropolitan, rural, therapeutic and specialty practice, and at Flinders Vision.

In June 2014, the first cohort had completed four placements and performed on average 247 eye examinations, 72 optical dispensing jobs and observed a further 448 examinations.

‘We expect these numbers to increase by 50 to 100 per cent in the last two placements,’ Professor Pesudovs said.

Optometrist David Welch found it rewarding supervising students in Adelaide and at Pika Wiya Aboriginal Health Service in Port Augusta. He also hosted students Luke Higgins, Thi Nguyen and Tamra Karolewicz at Port Lincoln.

‘I was impressed. They are well-informed, sharp and light years ahead of where I graduated 30 years ago,’ he said. ‘Their clinical knowledge of disease is very good, as is their refraction work. They are all aware of what needs to be done, friendly and good at giving clear information to patients. They learn through case-based learning, often complex situations to research and understand.’

Thi Nguyen said her placement at Port Lincoln had been a great learning experience. This process has made me a much more confident practitioner, particularly when it comes to diagnosing and managing ocular diseases,’ she said.

‘My communication skills also improved. This is an area Konrad emphasised throughout our training. Placements provide my colleagues and me with an excellent opportunity to build on our communication skills as we see a range of real patients,’ the practitioners there showed me how rewarding and exciting optometry in the country can be, now have a clear idea of what kind of practitioner I would like to be.’

Luke Higgins also spent six weeks at Port Lincoln.

‘The centre practices a very high level of optometry over a broad range of optometric specialities. Having this broad exposure to different parts of optometry was invaluable for my training,’ he said.

‘Placement is where I feel I could put theory into practice and continue to develop my clinical skills.’

Tamra Karolewicz said she did not perform a perfect consultation at the start of her placement but learned and grew from the experience. She saw interesting cases and pathology, and refined her refraction technique.

Another placement at the Australian College of Optometry had been one of her most valuable experiences. Having a different mentor every day at the ACO was brilliant. It opened my eyes to the many grey areas in optometry and that not all optometrists think the same,’ she said.

Leco Xu said her placement with optometrist Alison Steer in Albany, WA gave her an opportunity to vary her routine in clinical testing as she found one routine did not fit all and helped her explore different solutions for patients.

Adelaide optometrist Philip Milford had initially been concerned that supervising students would interrupt his practice, slow his schedule and reduce revenue through lost business.

‘I spent a lot of time talking to the students but they were excellent and helped with eye testing and tasks in the office,’ he said. ‘I was very happy as it worked beautifully for me and I enjoyed it.’

One student he hosted, Vanessa Parfington, said the experience had better prepared her for practice by allowing her to observe Philip Milford in general optometry and specialist contact lens fitting, and to perform her own consultations under his supervision.

‘Being trusted to interact with and assist Philip’s patients has improved my confidence immensely,’ she said.

Kate Wellie was placed in Richard Lenne’s practice in his home town of Echuca.

‘I found the optometry work valuable and exciting with many opportunities to apply knowledge of evidence-based practice, particularly with therapeutics, and understanding how important evidence-based practice is, especially with restricted ophthalmological visits,’ she said.

Optometrists interested in supervising students for clinical placements can email adam.stewart@flinders.edu.au.

UNSW 15-year reunion

FOURTEEN members of the University of New South Wales graduating class of 1999 attended an informal 15-year reunion in Sydney the night before the Super Sunday conference.

The reunion on 14 June in Darling Harbour was organised by Naomi McPherson (nee Huggett) and Paula Katalinic.

Other attendees were Ricky Yong who travelled from Singapore, Sonia Shin from Brisbane, Robyn Fuller, Barry Dean, Tony Ireland, Michele Hogan, Huyn Ju Kim (nee Kwak), Karen Chung, Mija Choi, Dianne Andrews and Max Humphreys.

Dr Michael Chilov, now an ophthalmologist and retinal specialist working in Sydney and a speaker at Super Sunday, also attended.