Working towards equity: an example of an ED project for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety

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Introduction:
The St. Vincent’s Hospital, Melbourne emergency department (ED) aims to be a centre of excellence and cultural safety for emergency care delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. High ‘did not wait’ statistics and some negative experiences of care for First Nations people reveal that we are not always meeting our aspirations. Collective desire and strong executive support to do better triggered the ED Indigenous Health Equity Working Group (WG) project, commencing in October 2020.

Description:
All ED staff disciplines joined the group, led in partnership by an ED physician and the Aboriginal Health Unit (AHU). Web-based meetings occurred fortnightly aiming to generate ideas and activities to improve the ED experience for First Nations peoples and build cultural safety skills and knowledge within the group. External resources¹ and Reconciliation Action Plans²,³ framed WG direction, which also aimed to align with AHU research and quality improvement programs. We adopted a strengths-based, action-research⁴ approach to engender sustained cultural safety capacity within the ED.

Outcomes:
The WG identified several areas for action, covering the welcome, triage and registration for First Nations people, the waiting room, waiting experience, processes and delivery of care, referral and discharge practices. Staff cultural safety and trauma-informed care education is a priority, including the trial of peer-peer education and creation of intranet resources. Structural racism and implicit bias present ongoing challenges to ED reform.⁵

Conclusions:
We are beginning our ED journey towards equity and excellence for First Nations people, hoping that our collaborative model will enable transformative change for all.

References: