

Doctors in Secondary Schools program

What is it like?

GPs, nurses and practice managers in the Doctors in Secondary Schools (DiSS) program talk about what it's like.

Hannah Millard DiSS Practice Nurse

Why does being in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program make you feel good?

Being involved in the program makes me feel good because I get to be a part the care of young people, and hear their life stories, share in their successes, stressors and support them as they navigate becoming adults.

What have you learned by going back to school one day a week?

I have learned lots, but in particular just how incredibly resilient young people are.

What's the most surprising thing you've discovered about secondary school kids?

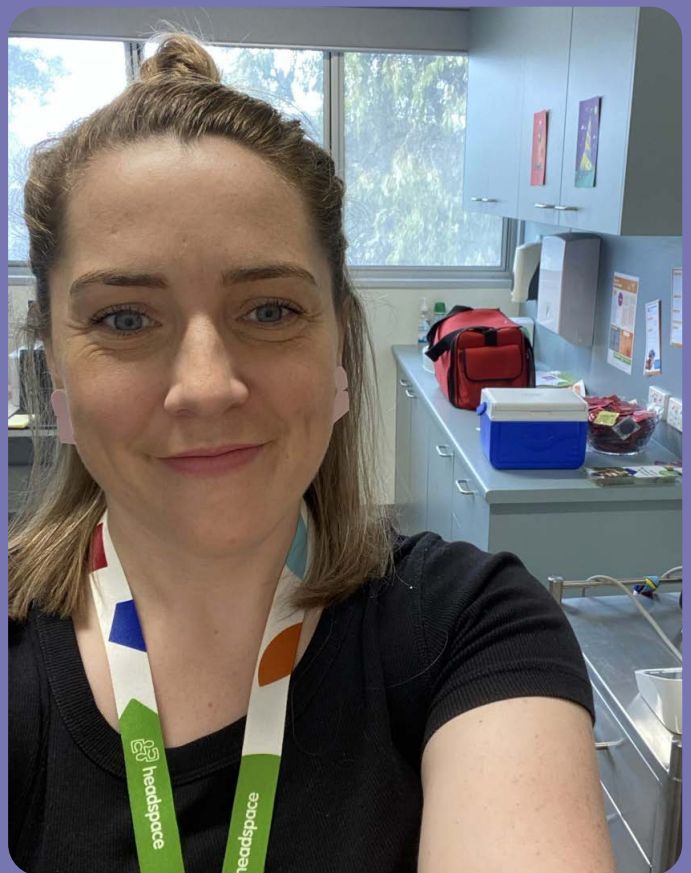
How very honest young adults can be. In a way it makes being involved in their care easier because they often tell you exactly what they're thinking.

How has taking part in the program changed the way you view your role as a doctor in the community?

I work as a practice nurse for DiSS but it has changed my role as a nurse in the community by realising how important it is for young people to be able to access quality health care, information and advice in a way that suits their needs.

What would you say to a colleague wondering whether to take part in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program?

Go for it! Each day is never the same, presents challenges but also lots of laughs and updates about TikTok.



Hannah Millard from Brophy/Headspace Warrnambool, DiSS Brauer College.

Jessica Chung

DiSS Practice Nurse

Why does being in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program make you feel good?

I personally remember myself what a stressful time high school was, especially in the senior years! The demands of school, homework, exams, a job, after school activities, chores, juggling relationships, friendships, exploring my own identity and feeling like my parents just don't get it! These demands among others can create significant stress and burden on young people. The adolescent years can therefore be an extremely challenging time and navigating health services to access support, advice or care can be very daunting.

Being able to help young people makes me feel great because I know it can make a difference for them during what can be a very challenging period in their lives.

Mental health affects so many young people and if we can support students then there's a better chance they will do well in school and beyond.

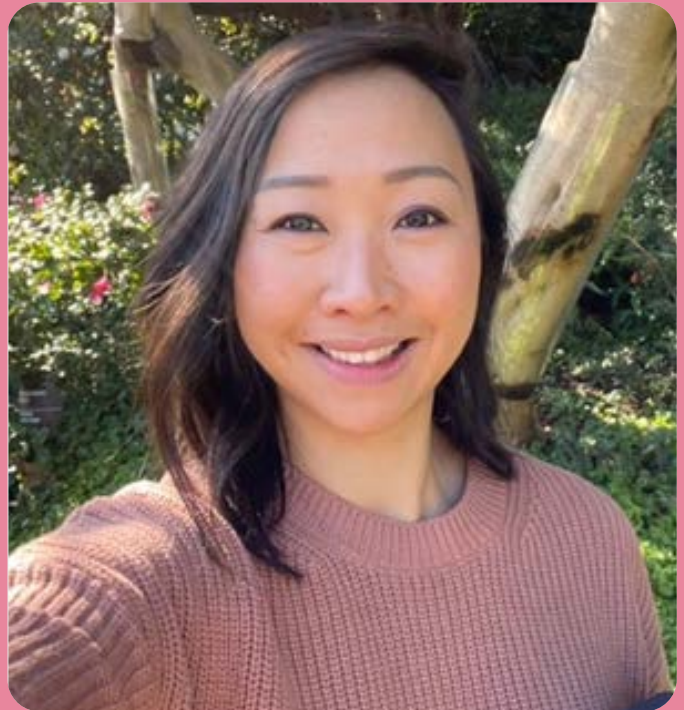
We also get a chance to create positive experiences when young people seek help, which helps to set them up for positive health-seeking behaviours through their adult life. Being in our portable on site at the school makes me feel like I am a part of their school community and it takes me out of my usual clinic environment, which is a very nice change. On my walks to the canteen I meet students along the way and have some great conversations with them.

What have you learned by going back to school one day a week?

There is a lot of pressure from school, work and homework, especially for the VCE students. Recess and lunch time go very quickly. Steamed dimmies from the canteen taste as good as I can remember on a cold day!

What's the most surprising thing you've discovered about secondary school kids?

With easy access to the internet (not the case in my days!), some students are quite well-informed about health information. Young people are quite tech-savvy and this can be an advantage. There are several wellbeing apps and youth-friendly websites that are fantastic resources. I have referred many students to them.



Jessica Chung is the Acting Practice Manager at GP Clinic IPC Health Deer Park, and DiSS Practice Nurse at Victoria University Secondary College in nearby Cairnlea.

How has taking part in the program changed the way you view your role as a nurse in the community?

Nurses in community health embrace a social model of health to advocate and give a voice to the community accessing care. In a system which is often complex and hard to navigate, especially for young people, nurses in community health are able to simplify systems, referral pathways, and access to care. We can contribute to breaking down barriers to health care for young people.

I have learned that the practice nurse role within the Doctors in Secondary Schools program is more than just seeing students. I also work closely with the school wellbeing team, coordinate care and take part in promotional activities.

What would you say to a colleague wondering whether to take part in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program?

It is a rewarding role! Certainly different to the usual GP clinic environment, in a good way. You get to be autonomous and work in a close team with the GP and the school.

Also, the training and resources available from the University of Melbourne is fantastic. I have learned so much.

Dr Dallas Smith

DISS GP

What is it like to be a GP or nurse in secondary school?

Working in the school environment has been quite enjoyable, challenging and rewarding. I have been surprised at the wide variety of presentations ranging from musculoskeletal, surgical and mental health.

Why does being in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program make you feel good?

It is great to be able to help out kids who have barriers to accessing medical care, or have issues which they may be reluctant to discuss with their family doctors. Unfortunately, it appears that there is a great number of kids 'suffering in silence' with treatable conditions and it is good to be able to provide care.

What have you learned by going back to school one day a week?

It has been a reminder of the challenges that come with being a teenager and the concerns that they have. I have been able to connect with several kids on these issues and provide guidance.

What's the most surprising thing you've discovered about secondary school kids?

A lot of them are quite mature for their age and have significant responsibilities such as helping care for younger siblings or taking on paid work outside of school. I am impressed by how much responsibility some of them can take at such a young age.

How has taking part in the program changed the way you view your role as a nurse in the community?

It has helped me see my role more holistically. Not only is it our job to diagnose and treat, but also to be able to help vulnerable kids navigate the health system and get access to care that they need. It is rewarding to develop rapport with them and be someone who they can confide in, especially for those whom have challenging social environments.

What would you say to a colleague wondering whether to take part in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program?

It is a rewarding program, and quite different to what I had expected. The variety of presentations has been quite engaging. You never know what will come in through the door.

We have a good support network through the school wellbeing team and local allied health providers. The infrastructure is well set up and the



Dr Dallas Smith and Sharon Okeleke, Practice Nurse from Eastern Medical Centre, at the DISS clinic at Dandenong High School.

remote access to our clinic's medical software has been quite seamless. Bookings are made through the school, with review appointments booked with our practice nurse whom also attends on clinic days. Consulting rooms are well equipped with most of the equipment one would expect in a general practice surgery.

For anyone looking to expand beyond standard clinic-based general practice, for exposure to varied clinical presentations and whom has a desire to provide valuable care to young people, I would certainly recommend the Doctors in Secondary Schools program.

Tamara Lowry-Cisar

DiSS Practice Nurse

Tamara Lowry-Cisar, Practice Nurse at UFS Medical and DiSS Mount Rowan College in 2021.

Why does being in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program make you feel good?

Privileged to be able to contribute to helping young people in various ways!

What have you learned by going back to school one day a week?

How dynamic the ever-changing school environment is.

What's the most surprising thing you've discovered about secondary school kids?

How diverse and resourceful they are when it comes to dealing with different situations like COVID-19 and schooling from home, particularly in 2021.

How has taking part in the program changed the way you view your role as a nurse in the community?

It has evolved my knowledge base, particularly regarding different programs available within the community, how to access different services and how to link students who might benefit from different programs and services.

What would you say to a colleague wondering whether to take part in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program?

I would highly encourage participation within the program, because it really is rewarding to play a part in ensuring students' wellbeing is supported and that every student you see has the access to free health care in a safe non-judgemental environment.



Dr Mark Timlin from headspace Dandenong, is the GP at DiSS Fountain Gate Secondary College.

Dr Mark Timlin

DiSS GP

Why do I enjoy DiSS and what makes me do what I do as a clinician?

Young people are the future of our country and the growing pressure placed on them significantly impacts their health and wellbeing, reducing their potential to follow their dreams and aspirations.

The adolescent years are a time of great vulnerability and DiSS provides a timely opportunity for clinicians to engage, support, prevent and treat young people from all cultural backgrounds making a tangible impact on their physical and mental health.

The benefit of DiSS will be felt by many young people for years to come and it is exciting to play a part in this.

one day
out of your
everyday

The program is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) and implemented by Victoria's six Primary Health Networks (PHNs).

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