Partnerships are the new black in health and medicine. Without taking advantage of the shared resources, goals and commitments we all have in the delivery of better education, research and health care, we lose a huge advantage. The newest of these partnerships, Sydney Health Partners, was recognised by the NHMRC earlier this year as being one of four world class national partnerships in health, as an Advanced Health Research and Translation Centre (AHRTC).

Sydney Health Partners brings together our three major Local Health Districts, Sydney Children’s Hospital Network, the University of Sydney and our affiliated research institutes, all with the commitment of sharing opportunities for advancement. Our priority research areas of cancer, obesity diabetes and cardiovascular disease, neuroscience and mental health, and infection and immunity, were pivotal in presenting our case for this recognition.

Recognised for excellence in all three domains of research, education and care, Sydney Health Partners has also developed ambitious plans for the future including joint projects in health informatics, professional education, and sharing experience in novel models of care delivery.

Of course many of our partnership opportunities are abroad and over the last decade we have built very valuable links that serve our students and researchers well. They also contribute to our national identity and stability.

Many of our partnerships are closer to home and not yet fully realised. Collaborations with other faculties are blossoming. Our links with Engineering and IT, Science and the humanities are strong as well as links with our other health colleagues. These partnerships will need to develop as funding bodies increasingly look to multi-disciplinary teams to answer larger complex research questions and our students enter a work environment where team work is ‘de rigour’.

Rethinking education

Many of the rapid advances in health and medical research and education have caused us to pause and question the need for a rethink of the curricula we teach our students in both our medical course, our postgraduate courses and how we meet the educational needs of our research students. This issue will be the subject of a discussion at our next Faculty meeting.

Advances in ‘omics’, imaging, informatics, data collection and management, the development of super intelligent computing and other early gestation technologies will dramatically affect the way we undertake all aspects of our work whether as clinicians, researchers or educators.

How we prepare ourselves and our graduates for this changing and dynamic environment is a challenge we must meet. One of our medical students and one engineering student were recently supported by two benefactors to undertake an international review of recent developments in IT and computing, new technologies on the horizon, and to consider how we can engage and even help direct them. Their report makes great reading and forms part of the direction for change that we need.

New directions

As many already know, after close to ten years as Dean, I recently announced my decision to leave the University early in 2016. I will be working with the Provost and Vice Chancellor in the months ahead to ensure a smooth transition. I am delighted that Professor Arthur Conigrave has agreed to take on the role of Acting Dean from February. Arthur has been a friend and colleague for many years, he has significant experience in many leadership roles, and this appointment will ensure a very positive changeover.

It has been an enormous privilege to lead this wonderful faculty for the last near decade, to work with committed and talented staff and students, and to be engaged with the many thousands of alumni who support our teaching and research, and who contribute in such a positive way to health care in this country.

In the immediate future, I will be continuing my clinical practice and research. But my main focus will be the review of the Medicare Benefits Schedule. I was offered the opportunity to Chair the Taskforce reviewing the MBS, this is a major endeavour but one which I believe is absolutely critical if we are to ensure a sustainable, equitable, accessible and high quality health system.

I wish you all a safe and restful Christmas, and thank you for your support over many years.