2016/17 Summer Scholarship Project

**Project title:** Developing empathy by walking in consumer’s shoes: Pharmacy student mystery shopping

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**Project type:** Dry lab, computer based

**Research theme:** Health Services and Patient Safety

**Project description:**
Currently there is no formal emphasis on the development of empathy in health education. Empathy has been shown to impact the care provided to consumers. Research evidence suggests that humans develop empathy through shared experience with other humans and that empathy actually declines in the first year of health professional education (Nunes et al, 2011). Many student health professionals are yet to gain experience of the health care system from the perspective of a consumer.

This project aims to develop empathy in healthcare students by assuming the role of the consumer. Third year pharmacy students (majority in early 20’s) will undertake the role of pharmacy consumers by “mystery shopping” a variety of pharmacies. They shall experience the care and advice provided by pharmacy staff for a range of primary health care conditions. This project will involve 60 students in their final semester of the 3rd year of the bachelor of pharmacy degree at The University of Sydney. (The BPharm is a 4 year undergraduate degree leading to registration as a pharmacist). Students will visit a different pharmacy each week for five weeks, enacting a new ailment at each visit. The pharmacies will be conveniently selected from Metropolitan Sydney, NSW. The students will conduct these visits in lieu of their standard clinical placement which currently involves observing practice for 2 hours each week. We shall conduct a pre-post comparison of student empathy via the Jefferson Scale of Empathy-Health Profession Students version to measure change in empathy. The role of the summer scholarship holder will be to perform the analysis.