

A novel, multifaceted approach to improving the health of international students in Victoria by raising awareness of certain infectious disease risks

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The number of international students in Victoria has risen markedly in the last decade. Many students come to Victoria alone, reside with fellow students of similar background, and are unfamiliar with the health system in Victoria and health problems for which they might be at risk. These health problems include certain infectious diseases which previously have received little attention and are the focus of this project, specifically tuberculosis (TB) and travel-related infections.

International students are >10 times more likely to develop active TB disease than Australian-born individuals. Therefore, international students need to recognise symptoms of TB, know how and where to seek medical care, be aware they will not be asked to leave Australia if diagnosed with TB, and understand that treatment for TB is effective and free. In addition, within a few months of living in Australia, overseas-born students start to lose immunity to certain infections that are common in their country of origin. They therefore may be more susceptible to acquiring these infections if they travel home for visits. Relevant health problems include malaria, hepatitis A and typhoid. Consequently, students should seek pre-travel medical advice before visiting their home country. Additionally, if they become ill during or soon after travel, they should visit a doctor promptly for diagnosis and treatment of potential travel-related illnesses.

We have produced materials to assist in the delivery of these key health-related messages which we intend to disseminate using a combination of electronic and social media, printed brochures, and face-to-face education. We will present examples of these products and we are looking to engage partners who have the interest and capacity to assist in disseminating these important messages to international students.

Bio for Amanda and Katherine:

Amanda has a PhD in virology and has many years experience of working in a laboratory. She is currently undertaking a Master of Public Health and working in the Infectious Disease Unit within the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Monash University. She has a keen interest in the area of infectious diseases and health promotion.

Katherine is an infectious diseases physician who works in the Infectious Diseases Unit, Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Monash University. She has an interest in infectious disease issues among globally mobile populations, which includes immigrants, refugees, international students, and travellers.