one day out of your everyday

# Doctors in Secondary Schools program

What is it like to be a DiSS clinician?

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

## Dr Anthony Emmanuel
### DiSS GP

**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 am able to directly impact the wellbeing of young people in my community. These children often have no one else to turn to for medical advice, and I am able to provide them with the care and support they need. Additionally, it is rewarding to see the positive impact that my work has on their lives, both physically and emotionally.

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

I have learned that the physical and mental health of teenagers is often closely linked to their academic and social lives. I have also gained a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and stressors that students face, and how these can affect their overall wellbeing.

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

I'm surprised to discover how mature and resilient kids can be in the face of significant distress. Despite dealing with difficult personal and family issues, many of t hese children are able to maintain a positive attitude and continue to work well at school.

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

I would say that it is an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling experience. Not only do you have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of young people, but you also gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and needs of this population.

Dr Anthony Emmanuel from Keys Medical Centre, DiSS GP at Keysborough Secondary College.

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

It has changed the way I view my role as a doctor in the community. I now see that preventative care and early intervention are crucial in promoting the wellbeing of young people. Additionally, I have come to appreciate the importance of addressing not just physical health, but also mental health and social wellbeing.

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# Mohita Suyal
## DiSS Practice Nurse

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

Being a part of the program makes me feel like I am giving back to the community by making an impact on the lives of students, our future professionals of various fields. This feeling makes me super happy.

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

It really does feel like going back to school! Getting all the pre-work done and being prepared for the students of the day. Most importantly, I look forward to interacting with the students and see them open up about their worries and concerns. There is always something new to learn with these kids.

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

They look forward to talking to you as much as you do to them! This is surprising, given that they are so busy with their school work, peer groups and social media. Once that bond is created, the students really look forward to attending their appointments and engage further.

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

Being a part of the DISS program can be overwhelming initially, due to the feeling of uncertainty about acceptance from students as we work in their environment. With time, connecting with school activities and engaging with staff played a huge role in making my journey of DISS very smooth and less overwhelming. This shows the more we connect with the community or setting where we work the more it helps in creating strong connections in community.

Mohita Suyal is a Practice Nurse at Southern Cross Medical Centre and DiSS Practice Nurse at Hampton Park Secondary College.

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

It is a very exciting and out of comfort zone type of experience but if you've given the chance, go for it! Once you create the bond with the students, it will be something you look forward to each week. I'm glad to have the opportunity to be a part of this program and share my experiences.

# Jenny Schulz

## DiSS Practice Nurse

Jenny Schulz, Practice Nurse at Whittlesea Medical Clinic and DISS Whittlesea Secondary College.

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

There are so many diverse problems that these students have to deal with. I love to see the progress that some of these students make overtime. They blossom with a little help from a team of dedicated teachers, doctors, nurses and allied health. A lot of these kids would fall through the cracks if this program wasn't in place.

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

I've certainly increased my knowledge in the area of mental health, especially teenage mental health. I've learned about the unique problems this generation face and how fragile our teenagers mental health can be.

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

I'm surprised by the complexity of some of these kids problems. These kids are strong but fragile. Guarded but eager to get help.

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

As a nurse, DISS is more hands-on in regard to mental health. This is the chance for us to intervene early with these kids and hopefully give them the tools to become balanced adults.

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

I could not recommend it more highly. A lot of the time in nursing, we don't see the patient outcomes. These students can be seeing us regularly during their school years and you can actually see their progress. If I know that we have helped just one student, then it has been worthwhile.

# Kristy Quinlan

## DiSS Practice Nurse

Kristy Quinlan, Practice Nurse at YSAS and DiSS Footscray High School.

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

It makes me feel great knowing that we are helping kids who are struggling find their feet and getting them through a rough period, and that our help and support will positively influence the future adults they become.

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

I've learned that teenagers are faced with a lot of difficulties and stress, but the causes have changed considerably since I was a high school student.

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

The most surprising thing is they are not as mature and responsible as they'd like to think they are, nor do they think much beyond today or easily remember appointments!

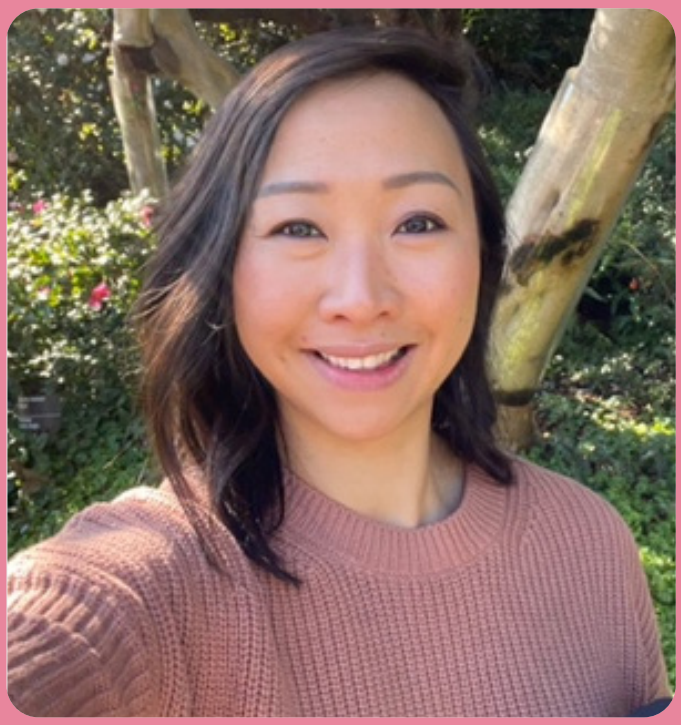
### How has taking part in the program changed the way you view your role as a nurse in the community?

I now understand how starting a simple conversation with a young person can open doors for them, and that it's important for all adults to 'see' young people and make that effort.

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

It can be challenging, but ultimately, it's a great way to make a difference in young people's lives and to love your job again!

# Jessica Chung
## DiSS Practice Nurse



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.

### 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.

### 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 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.

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

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.

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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