

The ACT Critical Care Society: A reflection on a new society led by students and junior doctors

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Author: Kyle Davies

The ACT Critical Care Society is the brainchild of Tim Fleming and Chris Wilder, a Canberra Hospital intern and an Australian National University medical student.

The ACT Critical Care Society

Like many good schemes, this one was conceived during a late-night phone call between friends and then nurtured over beverages during many late nights. Despite numerous university medical societies, encompassing many fields of medicine, no society existed for people to indulge their interest in [critical care](#). This gap provided the initial catalyst for that late-night phone call. From these humble beginnings, with plenty of hard work and an endless stream of emails, the ACT Critical Care Society was born.

We set out to create an *independent* society led by students and junior professionals, welcoming any individual with a passion for critical care. The ACT Critical Care Society has lofty goals, but we have the people and enthusiasm to achieve great things. We hope to engage students and health practitioners from all sectors of critical care. This is achieved by fostering an open and inclusive environment that enhances knowledge, improve skills, and refine communication. The ACT Critical Care Society provides a platform for career progression, research opportunities, and professional development at all stages of training. The society also provides a platform to acknowledge and celebrate exceptional achievements, even the small daily demonstrations of excellence.

The society sprung onto the scene in 2015 with an inspirational symposium entitled 'What is Critical Care?' This event overflowed, triggering an immediate response amongst students and junior doctors. Since 2015 we have been rapidly expanding to fill several identified gaps in the culture of critical care in the ACT.

A lack of formal education and career development in critical care

Critical care is an important component of education for medical, nursing, allied health and paramedicine students. In critical care we develop the skills to recognize a deteriorating patient and act appropriately, often in time-limited situations. However, upon being discharged into the world as junior professionals, exposure to and participation in critical care is limited.

As junior doctors we respond to emergency calls, but these can be few and far between. There are compulsory terms in ED, but critical patients are rapidly triaged and subsequently primarily managed by experienced physicians, [resuscitation](#), and trauma teams. Formal critical care professional development and education is often limited to compulsory advanced life support training. Compared to colleagues who intend to

pursue surgical, physician or psychiatric pathways, there is minimal opportunity for engagement and training in critical care in the early years. Junior professionals of other fields are in a similar position.

One of the motivations for the formation of the ACT Critical Care Society was a perceived gap between student life and a career in critical care. Targeting the ACT Critical Care Society at students and junior professionals, we seek to bridge this gap. Our annual symposium 'The David and Elizabeth Cusack Critical Care Symposium' helps keep the passion alive through a night of inspirational speakers. Our theme this year is *Beyond the ED...* In this symposium we will highlight non-traditional critical care jobs that exist outside the trifecta of ED, ICU, and Anaesthetics. This year we will launch a research showcase in conjunction with The Canberra Hospital ICU, highlighting local critical care research.

Education sessions & Dux Nights bringing people together

To narrow the long gap between annual symposiums we run a series of education sessions known as 'Decision Time'. 'Decision Time' is led by Canberra Hospital interns, putting medical students on the spot in case-based scenarios posing the simple question, "what would you do next?". Events have been universally well-received due to a constant evolution. The aim of 'Decision Time' is to connect students and junior professionals with critical care.

To pay homage to the initial nights of planning, we host regular 'Dux Nights' where burgers and beers are shared as individuals within the team exchange updates on progress and new developments. Meetings have seen ICU consultants, first-year students and everyone in between engaging on a social level, sharing thoughts, ideas, and most importantly passion. The relaxed, informal feeling has been essential to the ethos of the ACT Critical Care Society and helps foster an environment of collegiality.

Critical care is a distinctly team-based endeavour, and in time-critical situations, a functioning team is essential. While many teams function effectively during acute events, broader interaction, relationships, and communication between professions have been an ongoing challenge across the healthcare industry. This is apparent even at a university level where communication between students of different health professions is limited and university courses are both modular and insular. The ACT Critical Care Society aims to address this early by being an interdisciplinary society. The only requirement is a passion for critical care. As an example of this - our annual critical care symposium features speakers from the fields of nursing, paramedicine, medicine and physiotherapy, each showing off what their profession brings to the table.

More about the ACT Critical Care Society

While the driving force has come from students and junior professionals, the society did not come to life on its own. Despite existing independently, we have enjoyed strong support for the Critical Care Society. Senior staff from The Canberra Hospital and ANU Medical School met our enthusiasm with their own. Our efforts were strongly supported and our inspirational annual symposium relies on the goodwill of a diverse range of staff

willing to foster the enthusiasm of the next generation. We have also enjoyed the support of local individuals and businesses who have had positive experiences with The Canberra Hospital ICU.

The ACT Critical Care Society is a young society and like the people participating in our events, we foresee an exciting future associated with the uniquely demanding career that is critical care. We are eager to discover the direction we can drive the society and together intend to keep working to fill the gaps we identified while maintaining our original ethos. To students and junior professionals who are passionate about any field of healthcare, we would actively encourage you to consider starting your own society within your own locale. Or join ours... You may be surprised how many like-minded people will rally behind your cause and the excitement, benefit and fun will far outweigh the work required. It is amazing what can develop from a simple late-night phone call.

For those with a passion for critical care, please like the [ACT Critical Care Society Facebook page](#) to keep up with our progress and book your place at our upcoming symposium. Look forward to seeing you there.

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