Partnering for postgraduate research student mental wellbeing: The Write Smarter, Feel Better experience
Successful and sustainable partnerships, Workshop

Ms Melanie Carew1, Ms Karra Harrington1, Ms Megan Dench2, Ms Sabine Bird1,3, Associate Professor Simon Laws3
1Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) For Mental Health, Carlton South, Australia, 2Student Success, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Australia, 3School of Medical and Health Sciences, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia

Abstract:

There is a growing body of evidence that postgraduate research students experience higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to the general population (Woolston 2018, Levecque et al 2017), with estimates that one in two PhD students experience symptoms of psychological distress during their candidature. While most Australian universities provide counselling or support services for students, many PhD students delay seeking help until they are experiencing serious mental health problems (Woolston 2018).

Write Smarter: Feel Better is a proactive peer-based mental wellbeing program designed for, and developed in conjunction with, postgraduate research students. The program combines writing and productivity blocks with facilitated discussions which aim to build social support networks, providing opportunities for students to discuss their problems and seek solutions alongside their peers.

This interactive workshop will:
• Detail the development process of Write Smarter: Feel Better by the CRC for Mental Health.
• Describe lessons learned and adaptation of the pilot program into a university-wide program by Student Engagement & Peer Programs unit at the University of Melbourne.
• Detail initial findings on the impact on the perceptions of postgraduate research students regarding their personal wellbeing from a six-month trial in the School of Medical and Health Sciences at Edith Cowan University.
• Provide attendees with an opportunity to participate in short PhD student-led Write Smarter: Feel Better activities, and hear directly from PhD students about the impact the program has had on their student experience.
• Outline next steps for developing and deploying the Write Smarter: Feel Better program.

**NOTE ALL AUTHORS WILL PRESENT IN WORKSHOP**

Biography:
Presenters are:
Melanie Carew, co-developer of Write Smarter: Feel Better and Head of Corporate Affairs, Partnerships & Education at the CRC for Mental Health
Karra Harrington, co-developer, PhD student and clinical psychology registrar
Megan Dench from Student Success at The University of Melbourne
Sabine Bird, co-developer and PhD student at Edith Cowan University and;
Simon Laws, Associate Professor in the School of Medical and Health Sciences at Edith Cowan University