PhD Scholarship: Deepening our understanding of healthcare quality in Australia

Centre for Clinical Governance
The Australian Institute of Health Innovation (AIHI) is offering a 3-year full-time PhD stipend to a highly motivated student to work with Professor Jeffrey Braithwaite, the holder of an NHMRC programme grant for ‘Creating safe, effective systems of care: the translational challenge’, on a project to deepen our understanding about the quality of Australian healthcare organisations.

Using a quantitative cross-sectional approach, the project will both replicate and build upon a large scale European study (Deepening our understanding of quality in Europe; DUQuE) to explore relationships between quality management systems, clinical outcomes, patient safety, and patient experience within hospitals across Australia.

This scholarship is open for applications until Friday 9th May 2014 at 5pm, to commence in semester 2. The scholarships provide an annual tax-exempt stipend of AUD 27,979 (per annum), which is paid fortnightly for the period of up to 3 years.

Selection Criteria
1. Quality of academic record (a four year Bachelor’s degree with first or upper second class honours from an Australian University in health sciences, psychology, sociology, or a related field)
2. An interest in/knowledge of the Australian healthcare system, or equivalent qualifications and/or experience
3. Experience of undertaking research (including running research projects, analysing data, and obtaining at least one first author publication in a peer reviewed journal)
4. Potential for completing a PhD
5. Good organisational skills and demonstrated capacity to meet milestones
6. Good communication and interpersonal skills
7. Commitment to team working
8. Residency requirement: You must be an Australian citizen, Australian permanent resident or New Zealand citizen.

Expression of interest
Contact Ms Emily Hogden (e.hogden@unsw.edu.au) by Friday 9th May 2014 at 5pm to arrange a time to discuss this opportunity prior to submitting a full application. Please attach your CV and 1 page summary demonstrating how you meet the selection criteria the email.

Application Details
Please visit the Graduate Research School website: http://research.unsw.edu.au/postgraduate-research-scholarships and the AIHI website: http://www.aihi.unsw.edu.au/study-aihi/phd-opportunities for more information about the application process for entry to a PhD. To apply for the scholarship please contact Ms Emily Hogden (e.hogden@unsw.edu.au).
Additional Information
The Australian Institute of Health Innovation is offering a 3-year full-time PhD stipend to a highly motivated student to work with Professor Jeffrey Braithwaite, the holder of an NHMRC Program Grant: ‘Creating safe, effective systems of care: the translational challenge’, on a project to deepen our understanding about the quality of Australian healthcare organisations. Using a quantitative cross-sectional approach, the project will both replicate and build upon a large scale European study (Deepening our understanding of quality in Europe; DUQuE) to explore relationships between quality management systems, clinical outcomes, patient safety, and patient experience within hospitals across Australia (DUQuA).

Depending on their area of expertise, the student will focus specifically on the relationships between quality management systems and one or more dimensions of the levels of care provided by Australia’s healthcare organisations. The student will conduct research into, and participate in, the design and development of their specific project, utilising our partner healthcare organisations within Australia. Participants are likely to include hospital management and clinical staff, and patients with a range of conditions.

Study Background
After decades of improvements to the health system, patients still receive care that is highly variable, frequently inappropriate, and too often, unsafe. Whilst there is widespread agreement that the current way of doing things in healthcare is unsustainable, our understanding of how to affect large scale change is insufficient. In recognition of this, a recent study has been undertaken in Europe to deepen the understanding of quality (DUQuE). The AIHI has secured funding as part of an NHMRC Program Grant to extend this project to Australia and undertake DUQuA (Deepening our Understanding of Quality in Australia).

The DUQuE project has examined the effectiveness of quality improvement systems and strategies in eight countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the UK), enabling us to benchmark key features of improvement strategies in Australian hospitals against this large sample of European hospitals. We plan to measure the extent to which quality management system activities in a large sample of hospitals are related to:

- clinical outcomes for a selection of specific conditions (e.g., stroke, myocardial infarction)
- external quality assessment
- patient reported outcomes relating to safety, engagement, experience and involvement.

In conducting this research, we will provide evidence to help hospitals evaluate their own practice and develop their own effective safety and quality improvement programs, and support funding agencies and policymakers in the assessment of hospital quality. With internationally benchmarked data we will be in a position to design improvement and
diffusion strategies for Australia, which will factor in best practice from internationally tested strategies.

The candidate will contribute to the project aims, understanding what relationships exist between quality management systems and levels of care in healthcare organisations. The final topic of the PhD research will be determined by the candidate in collaboration with the research team, and is expected to be related to how quality systems management impacts on one or more dimensions of the levels of healthcare provided (e.g., clinical outcomes, external quality assessment, patient reported outcomes).