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Robots and virtual patients help train next generation of pharmacists

Robots and virtual patients are helping educate the next generation of pharmacists at The University of Queensland's new Pharmacy Australia Centre of Excellence.

Known as PACE, the ultra-modern \$100 million facility is now home to the School of Pharmacy's 100 staff and almost 1200 students, who were previously located at UQ's St Lucia Campus.

PACE was officially opened today by Deputy Premier, Paul Lucas.

The facility is situated adjacent to the Princess Alexandra Hospital at Woolloongabba, on land provided by the Queensland Government.

UQ's Head of Pharmacy, Professor Nick Shaw, said PACE was Australia's premier facility for pharmacy education and research, and provided an amazing learning environment for students.

"The hi-tech environment actually helps students focus on traditional, face to face patient contact," he said.

"This is going to become increasingly important because pharmacists are going to play a wider role in patient care in the future, particularly in the management of the growing numbers of patients with chronic diseases.

"From the moment students enter the totally wi fi-connected precinct, they enter a world where technology plays a key role in the development of their knowledge and skills."

For example, a lecture on models of dispensing medicines might include learning to use a dispensing robot – the only one in an Australian university.



The robot enables pharmacists to spend more time with the patients, rather than in the dispensary preparing medications, Professor Shaw said.

A patient counselling tutorial might include a mock counselling session in rooms with recording facilities so sessions can be reviewed and communication skills improved. Student don't need to crowd around a laboratory bench as a lecturer demonstrates compounding of a medicinal cream, because a wireless video camera records the demonstration and streams it to large flat screen TVs.

UQ Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Greenfield thanked the Queensland Government for the partnership on PACE and nearby research and education developments.

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“With the \$354 million Translational Research Institute Queensland and Boggo Road Ecosciences Precinct coming on line in the next couple of years, this zone will attract greater numbers of outstanding researchers, clinicians and students from around the world,” Professor Greenfield said.

“PACE is yet another example of UQ’s active engagement with the community – in this case, embedding our pharmacy students and staff in a rich clinical and research environment.

“This tight integration of teaching, research and clinical practice will improve patient care and lead to better health outcomes, particularly in Queensland.”

The PACE concept was jointly developed by The University and the pharmacy profession in 2000.

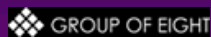
A GP Super Clinic, to be operated by The University of Queensland, and an associated pharmacy are expected to take up most of the remaining commercial space in Stage One when they open in August this year.

The precinct will be further developed, providing additional space for research and commercial activities.

Media inquiries: Faculty Communications Officer, Marlene McKendry - 0401 99 6847.

High resolution images of the PACE exterior and interiors are available to download from: <http://omc.uq.edu.au/images/PACE/>

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