

Careers in Allied Health

ADVERTISING FEATURE

From 2011, La Trobe university will be offering eight graduate entry allied health courses including podiatry and orthoptics. SUE GOSS reports.

A profession with vision

Seeing clearly gives people 'a window on life' and is a major part of social interaction. The slow reduction of sight through disease, particularly in the elderly or due to changes in lifestyle, brings devastation as well as dependency. Orthoptists, professionals dealing with eye disease and vision problems, are able to make great inroads into treating diseases of the eye in many countries around the world. In fact, Gabi Hollows, who continues the work of her late husband Fred Hollows, is an orthoptist.

"We play an increasing role in treating the burden of eye disease especially with the ageing population," says Associate Professor Zoran Georgievski, Head of Clinical Vision Science at La Trobe University. "The big four diseases that orthoptists are involved in treating are age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. We also test and prescribe glasses for children and adults in specialist eye clinics and hospitals."

Lifestyle factors, especially the growth in diabetes, have increased the work of orthoptists. There are only two training schools in Australia, and La Trobe University is including orthoptics in its allied health GEMs model from 2011.

(See www.latrobe.edu.au/health/students/gem)

FEET FIRST

Feet. You can't get far without them and walking well is a normal part of healthy life. It's only when walking becomes a pain, literally, that you

remember they're there. Feet affect posture, spine, knees and lifestyle. The allied health professionals who manage issues with feet and lower limbs are podiatrists, experts with a four-year double degree who are taught in Victoria by La Trobe University.

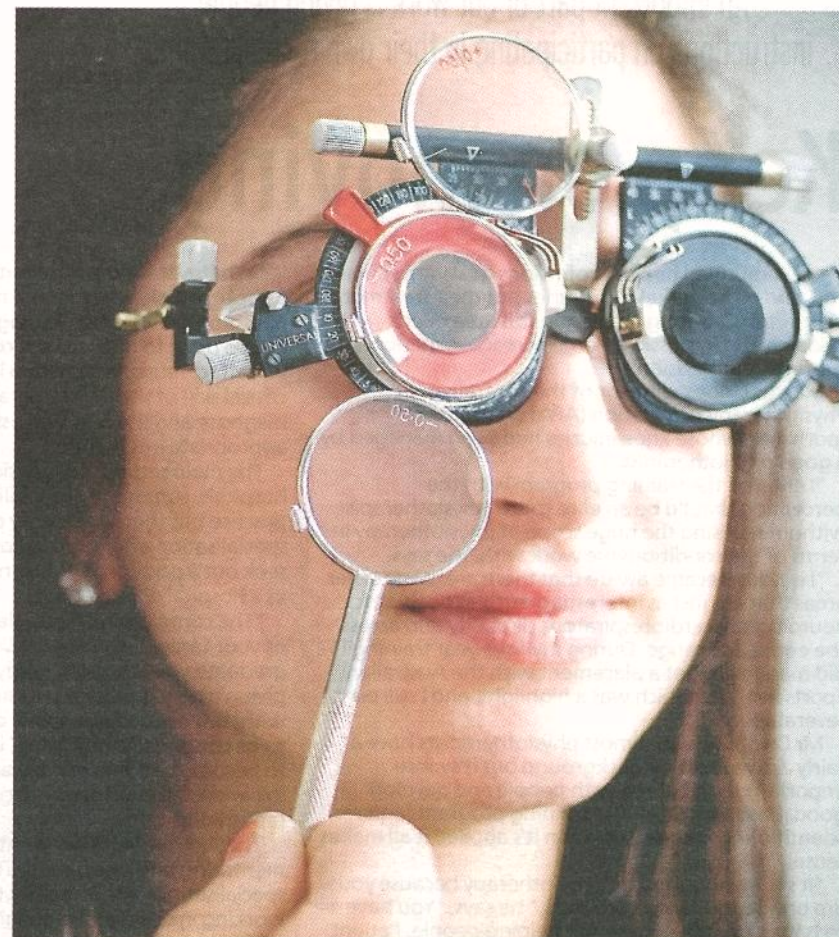
The vast majority of students come straight from year 12 with some mature age students. As from 2011, La Trobe is introducing a Graduate Entry Masters in podiatry for people with other related degrees such as nursing or allied health. This eliminates the first two years of health sciences and moves them straight into the Master of Podiatry.

How do you know you want to become a podiatrist? Dr Adam Bird, head of the podiatry department of La Trobe University, did his work experience in the Caulfield Hospital podiatry department.

"It was a really well-run place with leading podiatrists managing high-risk patients," he says. "There were people with foot disease due to diabetes — ulceration and in some cases amputation — but often they were treating structural deformities in the foot and ankle for people of all ages."

Dr Bird worked at Caulfield on graduation then began working in the large internal clinic on the La Trobe University campus where the general public can receive supervised treatment at reduced cost.

Research is strongly encouraged at the university as many areas of podiatry research remain underdeveloped. Dr Bird undertook a PhD in a study on how the use of orthotics and correct



footwear can affect muscle activity in the lower back. Prescribing and making orthotics is an important part of podiatry. The comfort provided by lifting the arch, taking weight off the back, and rebalancing the body, will get people walking again.

A patient is being assessed and measured for glasses by an orthoptist.