

What's up, doc?

In the medical world, ongoing training is needed to fill gaps in an ever-changing workforce, writes **Claire Halliday**.

FOR doctors keen to add to their skills and knowledge, a range of postgraduate study options is available at universities across NSW – with flexible study options ensuring that they cater to local and international students.

This is the first year Macquarie University (www.mq.edu.au), has had postgraduate medical studies at the Australian School of Advanced Medicine – an initiative to allow the pursuit of sub-specialty degrees for those who are already surgeons.

The new courses, unique in Australia, are the master of surgery with specialisation in neurosurgery, and the master of advanced surgery (cerebrovascular neurosurgery, spinal neurosurgery and neurosurgical oncology).

Coursework programs are just starting but the university's Professor Michael Morgan says 21 PhD students have been on board for a while, with the general intake expanding in the middle of next year when the university's own hospital is ready.

The biggest emphasis, Morgan says, is on the ratio of knowledge.

"This is a hands-on program and also, scholastically, rigorously assessed," he says.

At the University of Sydney, more established postgraduate courses

include a masters of medicine in pediatric medicine, sleep medicine or psychotherapy.

At the University of NSW (www.unsw.edu.au), postgraduate courses include a masters in sports medicine and a master of forensic mental health.

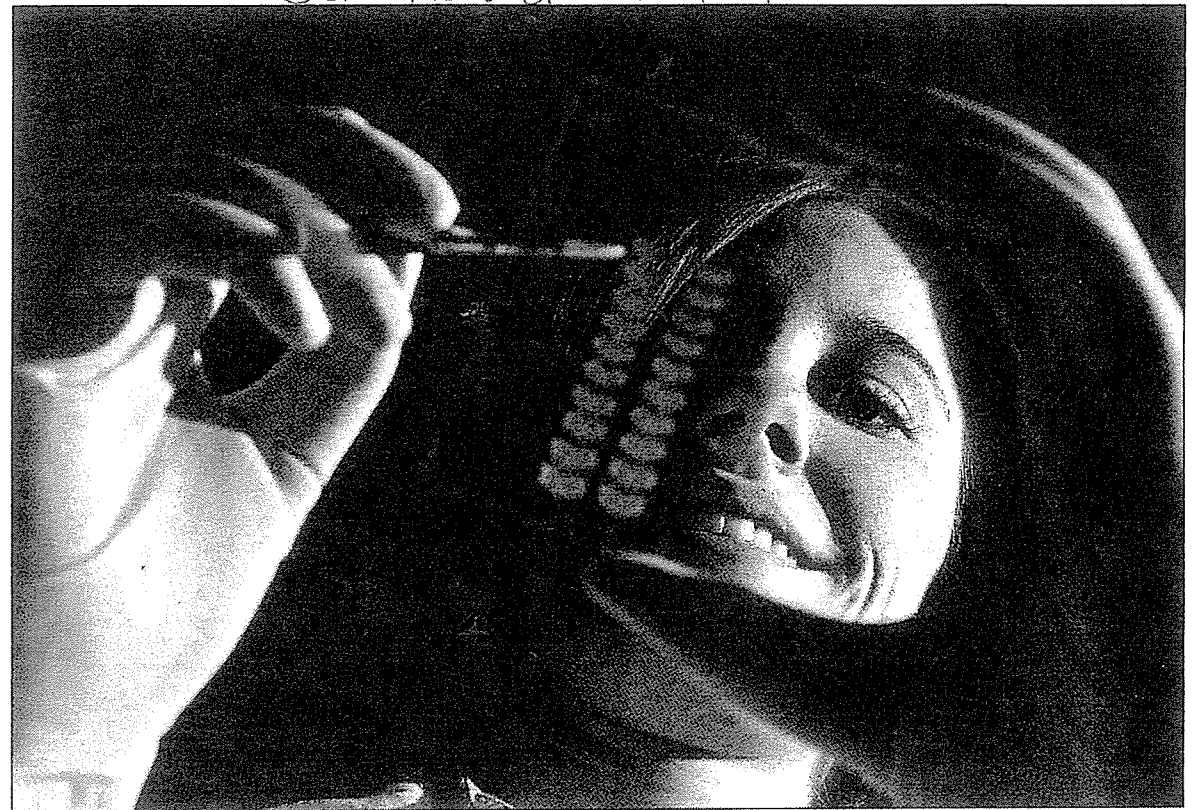
At UNSW, Dr Elizabeth Kaziro is the project manager of the master of forensic mental health program at the School of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine. The inaugural program is designed to help its students negotiate the interface of two disciplines: law and psychiatry.

Kaziro describes forensic mental health as a sub-specialty of mental health, in which scientific and clinical expertise are applied to legal issues in legal contexts, combining civil, criminal, correctional and legislative matters.

With a strong need for a highly trained, skilled workforce to implement these services – locally and overseas – demand far exceeds numbers of available candidates.

The degree, which can be taken over two years on a part-time basis, is designed for mental health professionals but is also open to members of the legal profession and correctional staff.

Also at UNSW, Carolyn Broderick is the director of sports medicine,



Grey matter ... postgraduate student Melissa Farnham is studying human brains at Macquarie University.

Photo: Lee Besford

which is part of a masters program going since 1994.

The majority of postgraduates, Broderick says, are general medical practitioners, keen to expand their knowledge of musculo-skeletal injury and how it occurs.

"We also have quite a lot of doctors from the military because a lot of the injuries they deal with are musculo-skeletal, too. [It's the same] with emergency doctors. There's not a lot taught about it in general medicine."

To complete the course full-time takes two years but Broderick says most elect to do it part-time, over five years. There is a live-in practicum for one year, where students are expected to do hands-on examinations four days a year.

"The rest is done by distance online learning CD presentations," she says.

> 'AN AMAZING FEELING'

MELISSA FARNHAM, 25, is in the third year of her PhD, studying an area in the lower brain – the "rostral ventrolateral medulla oblongata".

"I always wanted to know how things worked and why. I was also fascinated by medicine and the ability to cure and or treat illnesses," she says.

"I originally planned on studying medicine but in the final year of my science degree at Sydney Uni I decided to undertake a research honours year. That was when I discovered my love for research. With research, science became more than learning the knowledge discovered by others. I was now learning from my own discoveries

and becoming a part of the creation of knowledge. That was an amazing feeling. Doing a PhD was a natural progression."

Farnham says there is the "physical" knowledge, "such as experimental techniques learned and results obtained, which will, in turn, be the starting point for future PhD students".

"The second type of knowledge ... is common to every field of research. This is the development of a scientific mind – the ability that is developed over the course of a PhD of how to ask an important question, design an experiment to answer it, critically analyse it and then publish it."