

DICTIONARY MAKES HISTORY

The first ever anatomical dictionary of its kind translating between English and an Australian Indigenous language is being launched by Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS) at the Northern Territory library, Parliament House tomorrow.

Several years in the making, *Dictionary of Anatomy: Dhäruk Mala ga Mayali' Rumbalpu*y contains over 200 descriptive anatomical entries including everything from DNA to tear ducts.

Translator Yurranydjil Dhurrkay says that the dictionary will go a long way towards building better communication between western health professionals and Indigenous patients, health workers and interpreters.

Mrs Dhurrkay said, “ Yolŋu people want to understand the whole story when it is about our health. English is not our first language so most people don't always understand what is being said. When the English is teased out and it is put into our own language, people can understand. In this way, the dictionary is helping to create good communication”.

ARDS linguist Dr Marilyn McLellan emphasised the historical significance of the dictionary which translates between English and Djambarrpuyŋu, the dominant language spoken in north- east Arnhem Land.

“This is an important work given the time it takes for any two languages to bridge areas of meaning. You can't just translate things word for word. This is the same if you are translating between Chinese and English, or Djambarrpuyŋu and English. All languages need to go through this process” said Dr McLellan.

“ Words like cell, DNA and bacteria are obvious examples where there is was no equivalent word in Djambarrpuyŋu. Historically speaking, these things belonging to the microscopic world don't exist in the Yolŋu people's body of health knowledge. A less obvious example is the word muscle which was actually very difficult to translate because Yolŋu have a different concept of what this is.”

“ Our team of Yolŋu and non Indigenous health professionals and linguists, have found ways of describing these things in a way that makes sense to Yolŋu through their own language and health knowledge.”

Senior ARDS Health Educator, Dr Alyssa Vass is excited about the potential of the dictionary to assist health professionals to communicate with patients, improving understanding of their conditions.

“ Through my own clinical practice and the experience of fellow colleagues I know that improved communication most certainly leads to better patient outcomes, which is what we all want.”

In the NT 59% of Indigenous people, who comprise 31.6% of the population, speak a language other than English at home. It is hoped that this work will inspire similar resources in other Indigenous languages and other urgent areas of need such as law.

ARDS is a not for profit Indigenous organisation with over thirty years expertise in community development and adult education in Indigenous communities. This dictionary is one of several ARDS projects focused on developing in- depth health, legal and economic resources using Indigenous languages.

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