

RACGP presidential candidate video transcript – Gavin Colthart

Hi there. My name is Gavin. I'm a GP/rural generalist sort of person. Based, Yunbenun/Magnetic Island, just off the coast of Townsville, the unceded lands of the Wulgurukaba people.

I wasn't expecting to be recording a video in support of a candidacy for the RACGP presidency.

But I think we are in extraordinary times and conversations with friends have suggested that there is an appreciation of this amongst the medical profession, but also a concern that maybe not enough noise is being made, and that we're not taking advantage of the kind of moral authority that we have to try and prevent some predictable tragedies.

What I'm chiefly concerned about, and you can read more in my statement and get some picture of me from the CV, isn't winning the election here. I in many ways would not be the ideal candidate, a little too outspoken. I've got some background in corporate and governance and all those right things, but my feeling is that we need to galvanize the college and galvanize doctors, to dissent more strongly.

The College is a great thing. I've worked for the College as a medical educator and as an examiner. But they're very constrained and feel very constrained, in the extent to which they can protest, particularly proactively, rather than reactively. And proactively. I'm talking about some stuff that's coming here, probably from America. And if we look over there, it's a scary scene.

And it's a scary thing for doctors because I think what's happening over there is a signal for us to look more closely at what might be happening here. Small echoes. That are going to make it really difficult for us to practice with any kind of ethical grounding.

Probably the biggest and most obvious area is women's health in America. They're looking at rolling back voting rights for women. Whether that comes to pass, I'm not sure. But they're already criminalizing abortion to the point of talking about capital punishment. They're arresting women who have had miscarriages. And the intimidation level of health professionals working in women's health is extreme. We have a very strong, but small, anti-abortion movement here putting up bills which are getting voted on in parliaments, and getting votes. [In the USA this has become] the official policy of the administration within a year or two.

And I think that could happen here. Now, our colleagues in the Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have made very, very strong statements on this. And I think we need to be standing with them because it's going to make them vulnerable to attack.

The other things that's concerning, particularly looking at what's happening in America and the echoes here, are this move towards militarism. We are already supporting America in crazy interventions in various parts of the world - in Iran, in Lebanon, in

Palestine. The Ukraine war grumbles on, Sudan grumbles on. Massive civilian casualties and no end, but huge profits for people who are selling arms, and future profits for people who will use taxpayer money to rebuild some of these places. We're being pushed towards a war with China, which makes no sense. And which would be illegal as a war of aggression under what remains of international law.

The other issues, I guess, are vulnerable groups. In the States, they're targeting immigrants (and we're hearing a lot of anti-immigrant rhetoric here). They've gone to the extent that they are rounding people up and putting them in what are effectively concentration camps. With the help of armed ICE guys wandering around in combat gear. Rounding people up. And again, those voices in favour of that were around two years ago but, well, look what's happened now and how quickly.

The other thing too, I guess, here is the environment. In America and here, there's always been a very consistent pressure to weaken environmental regulations. And certainly, anything to do with climate change mitigation or prevention is pretty much off the agenda now. And we're hearing the same noise here. The pressure is on to unwind regulation of mining activities, forestry activities, drilling for oil and gas and so on.

We have a right to speak on some big threats, and we have a right to speak loudly and perhaps a right to speak in a way that might be seen as extreme. So, yeah, while I'm surprised to be doing this, I'm happy if we can get some discussion going around this. If maybe it encourages other people in the college to radicalize somewhat.

And, yeah, as I've said before, we have plenty of moral authority, and now's the time to use it.