

Sydney: All Saints Grammar Alumnus inspires students with message of resilience and purpose



All Saints Grammar recently welcomed distinguished alumnus Dr John Kokkinos (Class of 2013) back to the school as part of its Alumni Speaker Series, where he shared his remarkable journey from student to award-winning cancer researcher and future doctor.

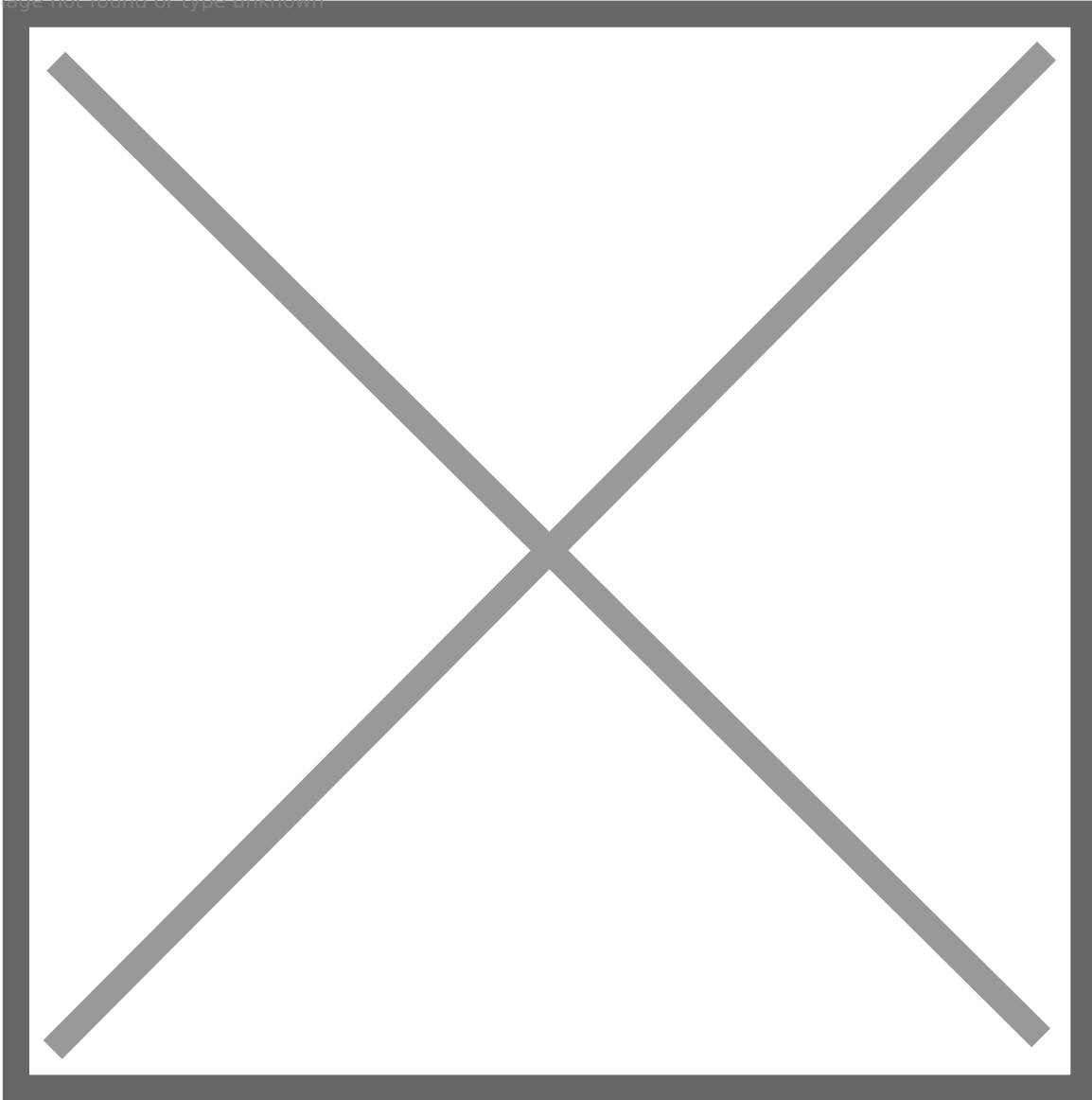
Addressing Year 11 and 12 students, Dr Kokkinos reflected on the experiences that shaped his career, offering valuable insights into the realities of academic and professional success. While his achievements are significant, his message focused on a theme that resonated strongly with students: the importance of embracing setbacks and failures as opportunities for growth.

Addressing senior students as part of the school's Alumni Speaker Series, Dr Kokkinos reflected on the moment his interest in medicine first emerged: "A Year 11 Physics teacher and assessment changed everything," he explained, recalling how it sparked an ambition to pursue a career in medicine. Yet the path ahead was far from straightforward.

Despite deciding in Year 12 that he wanted to become a doctor, Dr Kokkinos did not achieve the marks required for undergraduate medicine, opting for Medical Science. During his university studies, he underwent major back surgery and later

faced difficult decisions about whether to pursue research or accept the offer to study medicine - he chose research. He later re-applied for medical school and was rejected from the very school that had previously made him an offer. Going back to research for a year, he eventually secured a place and commenced his Doctor of Medicine degree.

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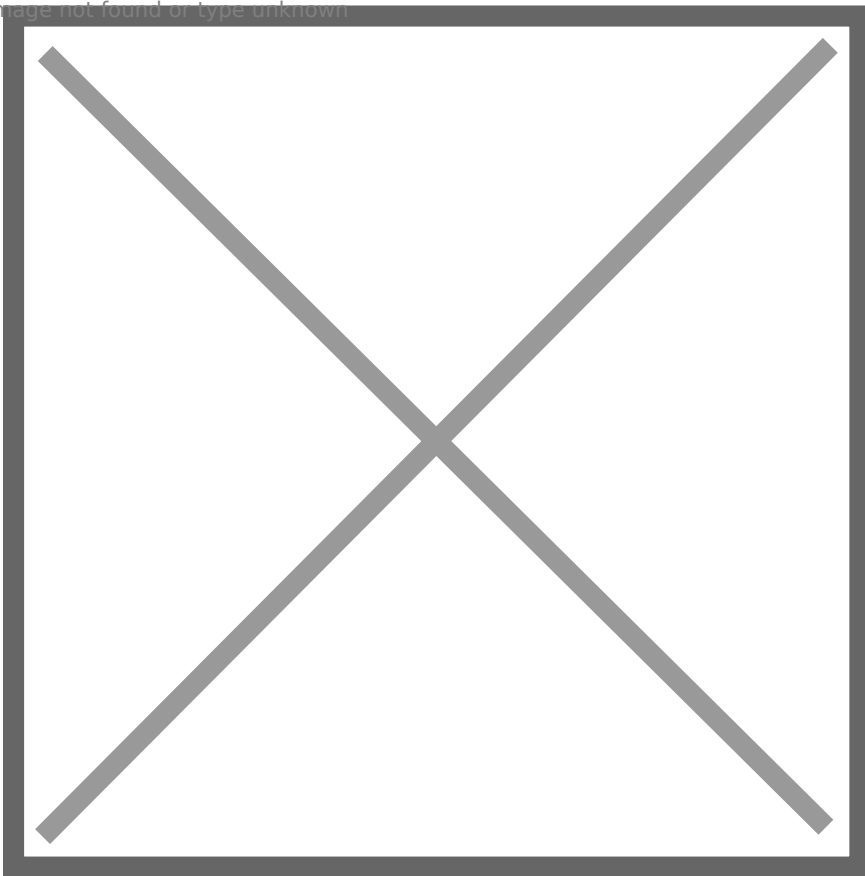
Rather than viewing these experiences as negatives, he encouraged students to see them as opportunities that can ultimately lead to growth and success.

“Although setbacks are difficult at the time, I believe that everything happens for a reason - even the failures,” he told students. After completing a Bachelor of Medical Science at UNSW Sydney, Dr Kokkinos undertook an Honours year in cancer research before being awarded the prestigious Scientia PhD Scholarship. His doctoral research focused on pancreatic cancer, one of the deadliest forms of cancer, with only around 12 per cent of patients surviving five years after diagnosis.

During his PhD, Dr Kokkinos contributed to pioneering research that identified new ways of targeting pancreatic cancer cells and played a key role in developing the first laboratory model capable of growing whole pieces of human pancreatic tumours outside the body. The breakthrough has created new opportunities to test potential therapies and accelerate the development of treatments for pancreatic cancer and other cancers.

Following his PhD, he continued his research through a postdoctoral fellowship, mentoring emerging researchers, presenting internationally and building industry partnerships, before successfully gaining entry into the Doctor of Medicine program at the University of Notre Dame in Sydney.

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Today, he is completing the final year of his medical degree while continuing to draw on the lessons learned throughout his journey.

All Saints Grammar Head of School Mrs Elfa Lillis said Dr Kokkinos' story resonated strongly with students because of its honesty and authenticity.

"John's journey demonstrates what can be achieved through curiosity, perseverance and a desire to make a difference," Mrs Lillis said. "His willingness to openly discuss the challenges he encountered along the way made his message particularly powerful for our senior students as they prepare for life beyond school."

"Our students saw that success is not about avoiding setbacks. It is about responding to challenges with resilience, perseverance and purpose."

Dr Kokkinos also encouraged students to seek out mentors, learn from those around them and remember that their identity extends beyond academic and professional achievements.

As a proud member of the Greek Australian community, Dr Kokkinos' achievements also reflect the strong educational values, resilience and commitment to service that have long been hallmarks of an All Saints Grammar education. His return to the school highlighted the enduring connection between alumni and the next generation of learners.

The Alumni Speaker Series forms part of All Saints Grammar's commitment to connecting current students with graduates who are making meaningful contributions across a wide range of professions and industries.

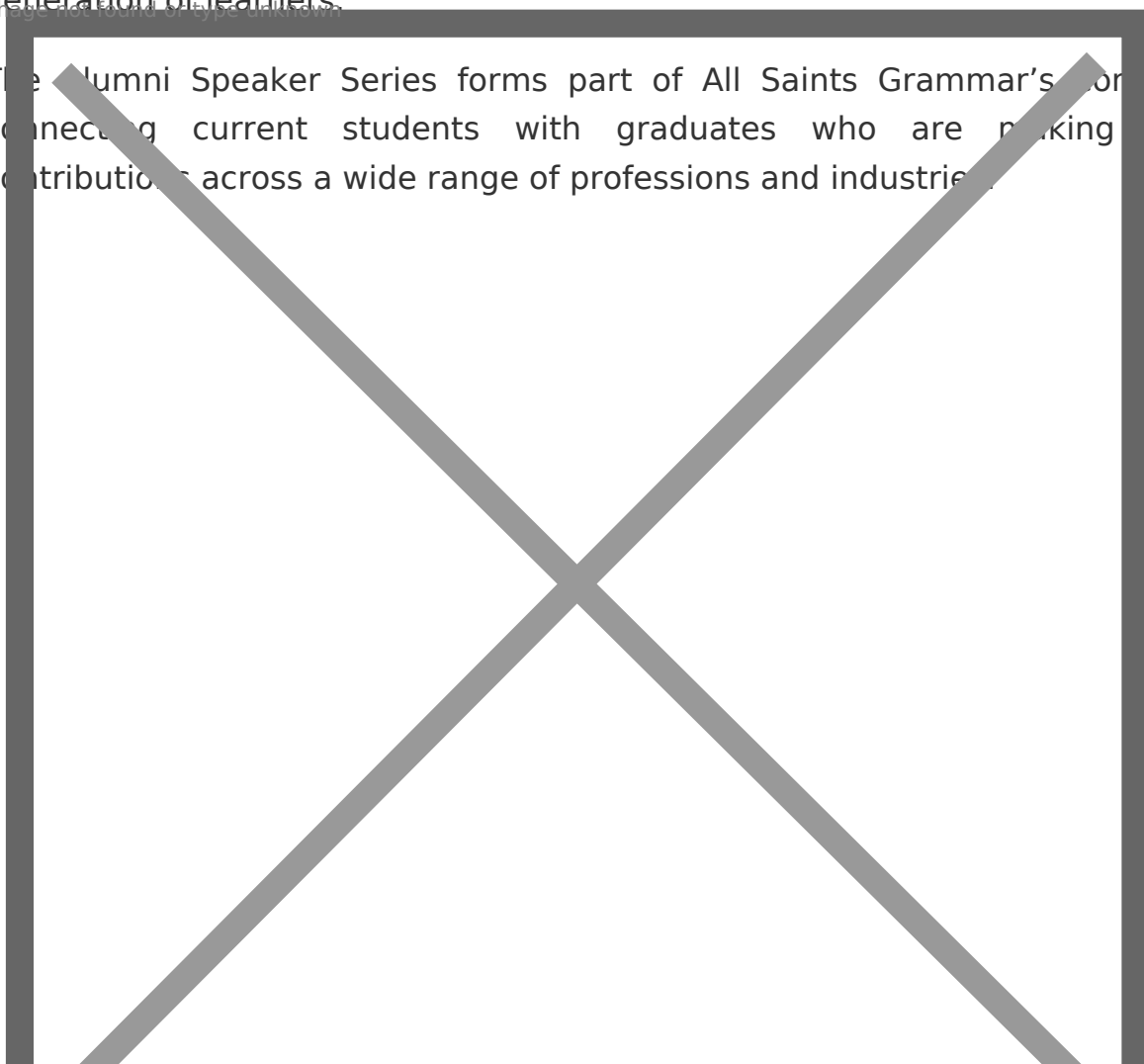






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