

**INVESTIGATING STRATEGIES TO PREPARE
EARLY POSTGRADUATE DOCTORS
FOR PRACTICE IN RURAL AND REMOTE
COMMUNITIES**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 The Rural and Remote Medical Workforce	1
1.2 Australian Medical Training.....	2
1.3 Workforce Initiatives	2
1.4 Recruitment and Retention Strategies	4
1.5 Impact of Initiatives.....	8
1.6 Research Question and Outline	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
2.1 Defining the Issues	11
2.2 Addressing the Issues - Current Initiatives.....	17
2.3 Successes and Failures of Current Initiatives	22
2.4 Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Interventions	28
2.5 Conceptual Framework.....	35
Chapter 3: Research Design	38
3.1 Ethical Considerations	38
3.2 Structure.....	38
3.3 Phase 1: Defining the Issues	39
3.4 Phase 2: Developing an Intervention.....	44
3.5 Phase 3: Investigation of the Program Trial	46
3.6 Research Quality.....	61
Chapter 4: Phase 1 Results - Defining The Issues	65
4.1 Introduction	65
4.2 Demographics of Key Informants	65
4.3 Results	65
4.4 Summary.....	86
Chapter 5: Phase 2 Results - Developing An Intervention	88
5.1 Introduction	88
5.2 A Preparatory Program.....	88
5.3 Program Implementation and Presentation.....	93
5.4 Summary.....	95
Chapter 6: Phase 3 Results - The Trial: Context	96
6.1 Introduction	96
6.2 Program Facilitators	96
6.3 Program Participants.....	97
6.4 Program Reach	102
6.5 Summary.....	103

Chapter 7: Phase 3 Results - The Trial: Feasibility	105
7.1 Introduction	105
7.2 Investigation of Hospital-Based Activities.....	105
7.3 Barriers to Delivery of Hospital-Based Activities.....	132
7.4 Overcoming Barriers	140
7.5 Investigation of Self-Directed Learning	146
7.6 Benefits of a Rural Program	148
7.7 Summary.....	152
Chapter 8: Phase 3 Results - The Trial: Impacts	155
8.1 Introduction	155
8.2 Preparedness for Hospital Practice	155
8.3 Preparedness for Practice in Remote Settings	161
8.4 Feedback from Rural Scholarship Holders.....	175
8.5 Examination of Self-Assessed Competency.....	178
8.6 Practice in Different Clinical Environments	180
8.7 Living in Different Settings.....	181
8.8 Intentions for Vocational Training & Future Practice.....	183
8.9 Summary.....	185
Chapter 9: Discussion.....	188
9.1 Introduction	188
9.2 Phase 1: Defining the Issues.....	188
9.3 Phase 2: Developing an Intervention to Address Issues	194
9.4 Phase 3: Investigating the Intervention	197
9.5 A Model for Effective Preparation	225
Chapter 10: Conclusion.....	227
Appendices	232
Appendix A. Project Information Sheet	233
Appendix B. Interview Proforma (Phase 1)	234
Appendix C. Interview Proforma Midpoint MEO/DCT	241
Appendix D. Interview Proforma Endpoint MEO/DCT	244
Appendix E. Questionnaire Midpoint MEO/DCT.....	246
Appendix F. Questionnaire Endpoint MEO/DCT	247
Appendix G. Interview Proforma Endpoint RMOs.....	248
Appendix H. Questionnaire A (Pre-PGY1).....	252
Appendix I. Questionnaire B (Pre-PGY2).....	255
Appendix J. Questionnaire C (Post-PGY2).....	259
References.....	263

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.	RRMA classification system.	3
Table 2.	Competencies required by rural doctors.	12
Table 3.	PMEFQ modules developed to address core competencies.	14
Table 4.	Review of curricula preparing junior doctors for rural practice	21
Figure 1.	Rural practice curriculum for junior doctors: A framework [90]. ...	22
Table 5.	Curriculum stakeholders in postgraduate medical education.	30
Figure 2.	Conceptual framework for closing the rural training gap.	36
Table 6.	Data collection points by timeframe.	39
Table 7.	Positions held by respondents.	40
Figure 3.	Overview of ‘trees’ identified in data analysis.	43
Table 8.	Coding system for phase 1.	44
Table 9.	Case study hospital and cohort characteristics.	48
Table 10.	Objectives and variables for interviews with program facilitators. .	50
Figure 4.	Overview of ‘trees’ identified in data analysis.	51
Table 11.	Objectives and variables for questionnaires to program facilitators.	52
Table 12.	Response rate for qualitative data collection.	53
Table 13.	Objectives and variables explored in junior doctor interviews.	54
Table 14.	Response rates for quantitative data collection.	56
Table 15.	Objectives, variables and timeframe for implementing the junior doctor questionnaires.	58
Table 16.	Coding system for phase 3.	60
Table 17.	Study characteristics addressing the four tests of good case study design.	64
Table 18.	Disciplines in which junior doctors should possess competency. ...	74
Table 19.	Areas of competency required for rural practice.	76
Table 20.	Skills, abilities and personal attributes required for rural practice. .	77
Table 21.	Priority terms for junior doctors in their second postgraduate year.	80
Table 22.	Courses identified as useful for rural preparation.	83
Table 23.	Topics or information suggested for orientation.	86
Table 24.	Education topics for the program.	90
Table 25.	Courses listed on the website.	91
Table 26.	Outline of content for orientation to rural practice.	92

Table 27. General information on the project.....	94
Table 28. Length of service in current position.	97
Table 29. Respondents by year of birth and age at internship.....	97
Table 30. Respondents by RRMA of town of birth and schooling.	98
Table 31. Degree to which medical school teaching and learning strategies contributed to current knowledge and skills.....	99
Table 32. Location of placements undertaken during medical school.	100
Table 33. Mean ratings indicating intentions for future practice during stages of career *.	101
Table 34. Term availability and uptake by junior doctors at Hospital 1.	106
Table 35. Education topics offered at Hospital 1.	108
Table 36. Term availability and uptake by junior doctors at Hospital 2.	113
Table 37. Education topics offered at Hospital 2.	115
Table 38. Term availability and uptake by junior doctors at Hospital 3.	120
Table 39. Education topics offered at Hospital 3.	122
Table 40. Term availability and uptake by junior doctors at Hospital 4.	127
Table 41. Education topics offered at Hospital 4.	128
Table 42. Benefits of having a rural support program.....	150
Table 43. Self-assessed competencies: changes over PGY2.....	179
Table 44. Preparedness for practice: changes over PGY1.....	180
Table 45. Preparedness for practice: changes over PGY2.....	181
Table 46. Preparedness for living: changes over PGY1.....	182
Table 47. Preparedness for living: changes over PGY2.....	182
Table 48. Intentions for vocational training.	183
Table 49. Intentions for future rural practice: changes over PGY1.....	184
Table 50. Intentions for future rural practice: changes over PGY2.....	185

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRRM	Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
ALSO	Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics
AMC	Australian Medical Council Incorporated
APLS	Advanced Paediatric Life Support
ARP	Academic Rural Practitioner
CD	Compact Disk
CPMEC	Confederation of Postgraduate Medical Education Councils
DCT	Director of Clinical Training
ED	Emergency Department
ELS	Emergency Life Support
EMST	Early Management of Severe Trauma
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HMO	House Medical Officer or junior doctor
JCU	James Cook University
JD	Junior Doctor
JFSS	John Flynn Scholarship Scheme
MA	Medical Administrator
MEO	Medical Education Officer
MSRPP	Medical Superintendent with Right to Private Practice
MTRP	Medical Training Review Panel
PGPPP	Postgraduate General Practice Placements Program
PGY1	Postgraduate year one or internship
PGY2	Postgraduate year two or junior house officer
PGY3	Postgraduate year three
PHTLS	Pre-Hospital Trauma Life Support
PMC	Postgraduate Medical Council
PMEFQ	Postgraduate Medical Education Foundation of Queensland
QHRSS	Queensland Health Rural Scholarship Scheme
QMEC	Queensland Medical Education Committee
QRMSA	Queensland Rural Medical Support Agency
RAMUS	Remote Area Medical Undergraduate Student
RFDS	Royal Flying Doctors Service
RP	Rural Practitioner
RRAPP	Rural and Remote Area Placement Program
RRMA	Rural, Remote, Metropolitan Area Classification System

SUMMARY

In Queensland, workforce shortages have resulted in early postgraduate doctors, or junior doctors, being required to work in rural and remote communities including in solo doctor practices. These junior doctors faced a range of barriers and difficulties. The workforce issues were unlikely to be solved in the short term. This situation prompted this research which investigated what strategies would prepare early postgraduate doctors effectively for practice in rural and remote communities.

The study was conducted in three phases. Phase one was exploratory and data collected were used to explore the issues that were impacting currently upon junior doctors practising in rural and remote practice. Core competencies and strategies through which to pursue these issues were also identified.

In phase two the *Supporting Junior Doctors Going Bush* Program was developed. The program aimed to assist junior doctors in their preparation for practice in rural and remote communities and to minimise the difficulties faced. Four strategies were devised. The strategies were to:

1. facilitate appropriate term allocations (where possible);
2. provide ongoing education activities;
3. promote attendance at courses; and
4. provide orientation for those undertaking rural practice.

Phase three was the trial of the program. Kirkpatrick's model was used to guide evaluation. Case study methodology was appropriate to investigate and evaluate the feasibility and impact of the program in four teaching hospitals. Two of these hospitals were located in rural areas, one in a remote area and one in a semi-metropolitan area.

The strategies were able to be implemented to a reasonable degree at the four sites. Process evaluation revealed that most aspects of the strategies were feasible. There were some barriers that influenced feasibility, in particular the

strategies focusing on education and course participation. The barriers were related to workforce issues. Lack of a full complement in staffing at the senior and junior levels impacted on the complete implementation. The orientation strategy was not well implemented in any of the three hospitals where junior doctors were required to undertake rural practice, although junior doctors reported they did not need any further orientation.

Junior doctors from the two rural hospitals and the remote hospital perceived they were prepared for practice in rural and remote communities. Fewer of the doctors in the semi-metropolitan facility felt confident. The strategy that was most effective in preparing junior doctors for rural and remote practice was exposure to a broad range of clinical experiences. These experiences were able to be facilitated best at the two rural hospitals. While junior doctors from one rural facility had been required to undertake rural practice in their second postgraduate year, doctors from the other had been able to spend this year solely on preparation for future practice. Participation in skills and procedural courses complemented clinical practice and enabled participants to gain hands on experience and practise procedural skills. Courses facilitated the improvement of participants' confidence and those addressing the development of emergency skills were noted as the most beneficial.

The *Supporting Junior Doctors Going Bush* Program raised the profile of rural practice and provided direction for hospital educators to assist their junior doctors with relevant preparatory activities. The program itself did not have any significant influence on rural recruitment or retention. However, rural experiences in the second postgraduate year were impacting on intentions to fulfill obligations of the rural scholarship scheme which was held by junior doctors in the study. The State Health Department, which is responsible for workforce training and retention, needs to ensure training is made a priority within hospitals and provide sufficient funding and resources to support activities. A model was outlined that could assist future junior doctors in their preparation. Any future rural programs need to be better promoted and resourced.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university;

and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Deborah May Smith

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