

Development of an allied health rural generalist pathway

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Background

Allied health professionals in rural practice require a broad set of clinical and non-clinical skills with the term 'generalist' or 'rural generalist' commonly used to describe this workforce. There are limited opportunities for early career practitioners to access structured and supported rural generalist training which is integrated into employment terms and aligned to the service model of their team.

Aim

The aim of this project was to identify and develop the key components of a rural generalist pathway for allied health professionals. This included workforce structures to support and create employment opportunities in rural areas, and the development of a structured education program for allied health professionals which would support the development of capabilities required for contemporary rural practice.

Method

This project built on work previously completed by jurisdiction health services and regional training networks. A structured education program for seven professions was developed with input from a range of stakeholders. Existing workforce structures and initiatives supporting rural practice in Queensland were identified and where possible, realigned to complement a broader rural generalist pathway.

Results

The education program developed consists of four key domains of practice: service delivery; rural and remote practice; profession-specific clinical skills; and inter-professional clinical skills. Workforce structures such as designated training positions with quarantined development time, co-located with a position of the same profession provide rural experience and development of rural practice capabilities.

Discussion

The combination of workforce structures and the education program will be trialled with early career allied health professionals within Queensland Health from 2016. Further development of the rural generalist pathway for allied health professionals, including development of a formalised accreditation process for the pathway, has the potential to make a positive contribution to the sustainability of the rural and remote allied health workforce and the proliferation of safe, effective and efficient rural generalist models of care.