

The Speech Pathology workforce in remote areas of Australia – What does the future hold?

N Kantham¹, D Carson²

1 Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, South Australia, 5001, kant0019@flinders.edu.au

2 Flinders University Rural Clinical School, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, South Australia, 5001, dean.carson@flinders.edu.au

Background

Australia's health system faces ongoing challenges of recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified allied health professionals to remote areas of Australia. While Speech Pathology has become an increasingly popular allied health occupation over the last decade in Australia, there has been very little research into the speech pathology workforce in remote areas.

This introductory paper outlines the demography of the total speech pathology workforce and the remote speech pathology workforce. It describes the characteristics and trends of the speech pathology workforce in remote parts of Australia which will assist in the development of comprehensive workforce planning.

Method

The demography of the total speech pathology workforce versus the remote speech pathology workforce in a 5 year period from 2006 and 2011 was analysed using census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The characteristics examined are: gender and age distribution, educational qualifications, employment sector and the changes in the workforce across 5 years – 2006 to 2011 including cohort change and turnover.

Results

The data shows that the speech pathology workforce is pre-dominantly female and young. While the total workforce numbers increased by 27%, the remote workforce has increased by 42%. The majority of speech pathologists enter the profession via a bachelor's degree and appear to work predominantly in the private sector. The turnover rate for speech pathologists in remote areas was 87% within the 5 year period of 2006 to 2011.

Discussion

Understanding the current remote speech pathology workforce is the first step in strategic planning for the needs of this workforce.