



The role of Physician Assistants in the allied health workforce in rural Australia

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Introduction

Physician Assistants (PA) have the potential to make a significant contribution to the Australian rural health workforce.

- trained as generalists using 'medical model'
- practice delegated medicine
- practice medicine in collaboration with a registered medical practitioner
- can work independently without direct supervision of their collaborative medical practitioner.

Aim

To investigate the potential role of PAs in the Australian allied health workforce.

Method

A literature review was conducted with key words, resulting in 70 articles and reports. Information was categorised according to countries (Canada, Netherlands, India, United States) with PAs currently in practice, existing PA programs or training in development and medical professionals with scope of practice similar to American-trained PAs.

Results

- PAs scope of practice, employment potential, contribution to productivity and quality of care contribute to the health care system.
- PAs could be implemented as a solution to the maldistribution of GPs in rural locations.
- National registration for PAs through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.
- Access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare Benefits Schedule could facilitate sustainable contribution to primary health care services and enable 'collaborative arrangements' between PAs and medical practitioners.

Conclusion

- Evidence shows that use of PAs in Australia's health workforce can improve access to healthcare and produce improved health outcomes for rural and remote Australians.
- The doctor/PA partnership is a non-competitive, time-efficient and cost-saving model.
- Pilot programs in Queensland and South Australia, and other OECD nations exemplify the need.
- Availability of sufficient rural training and graduate positions for all professions must be ensured.

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