University rural clinical placements: who gets them and what makes them successful?

Angela Titmuss & Mary Beale
National Rural Health Network
Where is the NRHN?
NRHN Mission

The NRHN is the peak body that harnesses the passion of health students through representation, networking, professional development and other initiatives in order to increase the health workforce and health outcomes of rural and remote Australians.
Multidisciplinary NRHN

Very dedicated to the multidisciplinary approach to health care
To investigate placement issues affecting student decisions regarding work in rural and remote areas
Rationale for placement survey

• The aim of the study was to ascertain a ‘snapshot’ of health science students’ experiences on rural placements, and to examine how the different disciplines compared to each other on the key issues of organization, support, accommodation, IT facilities, transport and mentoring.
Methods

• Student members of NRHN surveyed from May – August 2004 on their last rural placement experience.
• Survey was distributed to the clubs prior to their attendance at the 2003 NURHC in August.
• Criteria for survey involved -
  * organization of the placement
  * accommodation (cost/provision)
  * access to transport to their placement site
  * IT facilities
  * mentoring and support
• The survey data were collated post-NURHC and basic statistical evaluations of the data completed.
Respondents

• 379 completed surveys
  – medicine (26%)
  – nursing (28%)
  – pharmacy (11%)
  – allied health disciplines (35%)

• All years of degree
• Age
• Gender
Results

• Medical students the best supported
  - Accommodation
  - Travel reimbursement

• Allied health

• Most pharmacy and medical students had completed a rural health practicum
## Student responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Medicine %</th>
<th>Nursing %</th>
<th>Allied Health %</th>
<th>Pharmacy %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement Organised</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation provided</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation paid by student</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Costs Reimbursed</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Mentor</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Support Person</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed Placement</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would Consider Working Rural</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barriers to placements

- Placement not provided by their discipline (28%)
- No supported placements for discipline (13%)
- Cost (34%)
- Other reason (25%)
  - children could not work
  - lack of information on rural placements
  - extra effort to organise
Barriers to placement

Reason for Not Going on a Rural Placement

Reason for not going on a rural placement by discipline and reason
DEST submission

- March 2006

- Qualitative feedback from students
  - competencies needed for rural practice
  - Impact of placements
  - Deficiencies and strengths of current courses
Key issues

- Indigenous health
- Community life
- Multidisciplinary learning
- Placement consistency
- Longer placements
- Further learning
Successful placements

• Administrative support
• Financial support
• Clinical mentors
• Social networks
• Broad range of placements
• Educational resources
• Individualised learning
The impact of rural placements

“I could write pages about how my rural placements have influenced me - my rural placement in remote Northern Territory allowed me to see so many facets of remote and Indigenous Australia.

I do not profess to be an expert in these areas now, but I have a greater understanding of problems and health issues affected the broad cross-section of community from metropolitan to remote Indigenous Australians.

I have a better idea of what I do not know and have the confidence to further seek information and experiences in this area.

There is just so much more out there than I had realised!”
Recommendations

• Provide placement opportunities
• Remove the barriers
• Address the disparity between courses
• Adequately fund placements and mentors