The costs of clinical education for occupational therapy students

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Issues

- Adecdotal evidence about financial hardship experienced by AHP students
- Scant empirical data for OTs
Aim of pilot study

- To determine cost factors for OT students undertaking clinical placements in rural settings
Covered today

- Rural
- Prac costs
- Total experience
- Social
- Lost Earnings

Implications

Occupational Therapy @ ECU
Design

Focus group interview
4th Yr OT students (WA)

Questionnaire

Q’ld
NSW
Vic

Occupational Therapy @ ECU
Method

- Descriptive survey - 3 OT courses
- 3rd and 4th yr OT students
- Full-time 4 – 14 wks
Sampling frame

3 courses

- Qld: 111, 51 (46%)
- NSW: 65, 24 (37%)
- Vic: 57, 14 (26%)

Overall response rate 39%
Demographics

Overall
• Median age 21yrs
• Females (93%)
Practicum costs - car use

Yes - Paid
10%

Yes - Not Paid
46%

No
44%
## Other practicum costs

- Clothing (not uniforms)
- Uniforms, shoes
- Safety boots, goggles
- Internet, mobile phone
- Lunch, tea clubs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport – petrol, fares, parking, tolls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● if on a rural prac</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Lost earnings

![Bar chart showing frequency of lost earnings]

- $0
- $101-$150
- $150+

Occupational Therapy @
Rural Placements

Placements

Qld | NSW | Vic
---|-----|-----
Yes | No  | Yes | No  | Yes | No  |
No  | No  | No  | No  | No  | No  |
Cost of travel to rural practicum
Accommodation type during practicum

- Family/Friends: 13
- Caravan: 5
- Boarding house: 5
- Hospital: 10
- Rental: 20

Occupational Therapy @ ECU
Weekly rent - temporary accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$500</td>
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<td>$&gt;100</td>
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Social costs of practicum

- Exhaustion
- Loneliness
- Diminished social activities
- Stress
How did you find being away from home?

- Difficult to present a happy face & be enthusiastic when you're alone.
- Hard to make friends when there aren't any other students.
- Exciting, challenging, different, positive
- Felt miserable, lost uncomfortable.
- Financially draining.
- Inconvenient living out of bags & car.
Benefits of practicum

- Excellent learning opportunity
- Professional growth
- Skills in team work
- Networking
- Travel
- Rural experience
The experience

- Stress: 49% (-)
- Exciting: 7% (+)
- Independence: 11% (+)
- $ Costs: 33% (-)
The bottom line

Positive 12%
Ambivalent 41%
Negative 47%
Implications for practice

- Students have negative experiences
  - Generates negative perception amongst peers

- Counter-productive for workforce related issues –
  - recruitment & retention
Recommendations

- SARRAH lobby the Federal Gov’t for financial support for:
  - AHP students on rural pracs to compensate for costs such as accommodation, travel & lost income
  - clinical supervision & admin services to enhance the quality of student pracs.
Rural practitioners

- Consider
  - pastoral care needs of students
  - ways to reduce students’ financial costs – large & small – they all count
  - finding casual part time employment for students on prac
Universities

- Develop comprehensive orientation materials for rural pracs
- Provide structural supports for students
- Lobby for better funding (HE sector)
  - Deans of health sciences
  - Professional associations
  - Peak organisations – SARRAH, Allied Health Professions Australia
Consequences of inaction

Fact
- Links between successful practicum experiences & recruitment are clear

Hypothesis
- Students’ negative experiences → recruitment issues → increasingly difficult to attract OTs to R³ Australia

Bottom line
- Our R³ communities won’t get comprehensive AHP services they need & deserve