

## Enhancing computer literacy and information retrieval skills: a rural and remote nursing and midwifery workforce study

Jane Mills<sup>1</sup>, Marg McLeod<sup>2</sup>, Karen Francis<sup>3</sup>, Mohammad Al-Motlaq Shutnawi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>James Cook University, <sup>2</sup>Australian Catholic University, <sup>3</sup>Charles Sturt University,

<sup>4</sup>Hashemite University Zarqa-Jordan

Nurses and midwives, collectively, represent the largest workforce category in rural and remote areas of Australia. Maintaining currency of practice and attaining annual licensure with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Authority (AHPRA) present challenges for individual nurses and midwives and for their health service managers. Engagement with information and communication technology, in order for geographically isolated clinicians to access ongoing education and training, is considered a useful strategy to address such challenges.

This paper presents a pre- and post-test study design, which examines the impact of an online continuing professional development (CPD) program on rural nurses and midwives. The aims of the program were to increase basic skill acquisition in the utilisation of common computer software, the use of the Internet, and the enhancement of email communication.

Findings from the study demonstrate that participants who complete a relevant CPD program gain confidence in the use of information and communication technology. Further, increased confidence leads to increased access to contemporary, reliable and important health care information on the Internet, in addition to clinicians adopting email as a regular method of communication.

Health care employers commonly assume employees are skilled users of information and communication technology. However, findings from this study contradict such assumptions. It is argued in the recommendations that health care employees should be given regular access to CPD programs designed to introduce them to information and communication technology. Developing knowledge and skills in this area has the potential to improve staff productivity, raise health care standards and improve patient outcomes.