

## Improving quality use of medicines in the bush

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Australians in rural and remote areas have shorter lives and higher rates of disease and injury than people in urban centres. In addition to having a greater burden of disease, populations in rural and remote areas face increased challenges in accessing appropriate health care, including issues related to geography, availability of health professionals, and rural culture.

Workforce issues are a significant barrier to access to health care in remote areas, with rural and remote health services often struggling to secure resources and recruit and retain staff. One of the strategies employed to improve access to health care services in remote areas is the recruitment and training of remote area nurses (RANs). RANs practise at an advanced level often with limited or distant medical support. The extended scope of practice requires RANs to have a broad knowledge base in relation to disease management, including the administration, monitoring, supply and storage of medications.

Recognising the extended scope of practice of RANs and the additional challenges this presents in ensuring quality use of medicines (QUM), highlights the need for advanced knowledge and skills management. The Centre for Remote Health (CRH) provides a course in the practical use of medicines in disease management aimed at ensuring medicines are used appropriately, effectively, judiciously and safely, called Pharmacotherapeutics for RANs. The pharmacotherapeutics program is designed to assist RANs in developing knowledge and skills in the use of medications, the risks associated with them, and strategies to increase the benefits and minimise the risks of treatments. The course covers conditions, both chronic and acute, that are common to remote practice and challenges participants to think beyond the usual scope of being a nurse. A practical approach to disease management is promoted, underpinned by principles of drug therapy, such as adverse reactions, interactions, pharmacology, adherence and professional and legislative issues.

In 2014 CRH conducted a survey of participants who had completed pharmacotherapeutics for RANs. Respondents stated that the training had increased their awareness of drug interactions and side effects of medications, and had given them strategies to enhance adherence. It had also increased their understanding of legal and legislative requirements, prescribing process, medication review process, risks of medications, and increased competence in utilising recommended reference material.

**Policy recommendation:** Funding for educational programs to prepare and upskill the remote health workforce needs to be maintained at appropriate levels.