



Pulling people, places, pages and pathologies together through farm health

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Background: Social isolation, lack of connectivity, connectedness and poor quality information have been cited as influencing health, wellbeing and safety outcomes for rural and remote populations. Of particular concern has been the dearth of rural topics on the highly accessed Better Health Channel (BHC) with previously nil resources focusing on farmers' health.

This paper outlines the union of people, places, pages and pathologies by collaboratively developing an online presence to engage, improve access and make a real difference to farmer's lives.

Method: A search examined all sites providing farmer health information to identify gaps. A skills-based, consumer-focused advisory committee was established comprising farmers, (with varied levels of computer literacy) industry representatives, health professionals and IT specialists. Quarterly meetings over 3.5 years functioned to design, develop, implement and evaluate the website. A partnership was established with the BHC to increase agricultural specific content. To ensure credible and up-to-date health information, Health on the Net Foundation (HONcode) accreditation was sought. The HON Foundation is a non-government organisation ensuring adherence to a basic set of principals and certifying websites publishing reliable health information.

Results: In April 2010 the HONcode accredited www.farmerhealth.org.au website was launched with over 80 fully referenced farmer health, wellbeing and safety fact sheets, shared through RSS feeds with BHC. Weather, videos, discussion forums, education and interactive learning tools were provided. Since 2010, www.farmerhealth.org.au has had over 90,000 unique Australian and international visitors and over 350,000 page views.

The most accessed pages have consistently been the zoonotic disease Scabby mouth (Orf), eye injuries, succession planning, crush injuries and depression. This reflects both the nature of the farming population's need for information and the health and wellbeing issues experienced by farmers.

The website has also been used to communicate with rural people generally. One successful example was through the 'farming in focus' photography competition, attracting over 1100 digital submissions available for viewing on the website and via a touring public exhibition.

Discussion: Building on the original website, we now disseminate information and encourage engagement through a variety of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, BHC, university webpage and a mobile-ready website.

Given the continuance of poor digital access in rural communities, the possibilities are endless as to who, where and how we send the message and quality information to improve farmer health.

Recommendation: We recommend fast, reliable digital access be an urgent priority for rural communities.