Pharmacotherapeutics for remote area nurses

Frances Vaughan, Sabina Knight, Centre for Remote Health

Remote area nurses (RANs) are an integral part of health care delivery to remote Australia. They constitute over fifty per cent of the health workforce in remote areas and most RANs work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Remote areas present particular challenges to the delivery of quality services—dispersed population, poor health status, diverse cultures, geographic isolation, problematic transport, poor infrastructure, small economic base, harsh extremes of climate and a high turnover of health professionals. The diversity in nature of the RAN’s role and the reduced access to other primary health care professionals, including doctors and pharmacists, means that they often undertake roles that are not traditionally seen as nursing roles. The supply and monitoring of medication is one of these roles and RANs require training and support in this role if quality use of medicines by their clients is to be encouraged.

The Centre for Remote Health (CRH) aims to contribute to the improved health outcomes of people in remote communities of the Northern Territory and Australia, through the provision of high quality tertiary education, training and research focusing on the discipline of remote health. The CRH in collaboration with the Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANA) has developed a short course in pharmacotherapeutics designed for RANs who work in or are planning to work in remote, rural or isolated practice. The course discusses issues of client adherence and legislative barriers and opportunities. Case studies are used in the two-day workshop to introduce basic concepts of pharmacokinetics and pharmacology and the drug treatment of acute and chronic conditions commonly encountered in the remote setting including infections, diabetes, renal and heart disease and respiratory disease. An assessment workbook allows the concepts to be consolidated after the workshop is completed. This course has attracted over 100 participants annually and is offered in a number of centres and in remote areas. Student evaluation of this course has been extremely positive.