The attractiveness of Australia’s rural and remote spine for health professionals

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The first decade of the 21st century represented a time of great change in rural and remote South Australia and the Northern Territory (Australia’s ‘spine’). There was a sustained drought in the south. There was a tremendous increase in resource extractive activity in the centre and north. The global financial crisis changed corporate, public and personal economies. There was a major focus on Indigenous health and wellbeing, particularly under the Northern Territory Emergency Response and the Working Futures policy. Economies were restructured, and the nature of rural and remote settlement changed dramatically. Into this context came a new health professional workforce drawn from the ranks of fresh university graduates, ‘reverse migrating’ urban practitioners, overseas-trained professionals, Indigenous communities, and ‘un-retired’ workers who found their superannuation arrangements suddenly inadequate for their needs. This paper uses data from the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Census to examine who these new arrivals were, where they were attracted to, and how the spatial and occupational distributions of health professionals along Australia’s rural and remote spine changed over the decade.