Emerging health professions: an opportunity for rural health

Francesca Garnett¹², Madeleine Venables¹³
¹National Rural Health Students’ Network, ²University of New South Wales, ³University of Western Australia

Background: The changing landscape of rural health requires innovative and unique solutions to address challenges in providing a health workforce to meet the needs of rural and remote Australia. The move toward ‘rural generalists’ across many health disciplines is an exciting and encouraging development, and is welcomed by those future health professionals looking to train and work in rural Australia.

Aims: This presentation will outline the factors that future rural health professionals seek in a training pathway, and how the emergence of new generalist health professions impacts on this. It will also outline the National Rural Health Students’ Network (NRHSN) position paper on the emerging training pathways for all health professionals, and examine how this can be integrated into future practice.

Key points:

• Rural and remote Australia needs health professionals suited to the unique style of practice in non-metropolitan Australia. This often means practitioners must have a broader and more multidisciplinary scope of practice/care.

• Training pathways for health professionals need to reflect this need and provide rural-specific training opportunities for health students. This is crucial to encouraging innovative future rural health workforce members, and ensuring the current gap in health service delivery is appropriately filled.

• New training pathways need to be well advertised and communicated for students to be able to engage with them, as there currently appears to be a lack of knowledge about this growing area of health care.

• Clear training pathways into rural generalist practice are an important way of encouraging tomorrow’s health professionals to consider a rural career.

• Novel health professionals are an opportunity to develop and implement exciting new models of practice.

• However, new models of practice still need to be considered within the context of current practice, in order to ensure the most effective changes are achieved.

• Appropriate supervision needs to be procured for any new training model, as this will allow for the highest quality model to be generated.

Conclusion: Emerging ‘generalist’ health professions, new models of training and innovative ways of practising are attractive opportunities for future workforce members when considering a rural or remote career pathway. However, it is crucial that these new ways of
training and working are well articulated and developed in concert with current ways of practising, to ensure they achieve their goals of improving rural health service delivery and reach their maximal success.