Educating midwives for rural practice

Pauline Glover

School of Nursing and Midwifery, Flinders University

Flinders University has been a leader in educating midwives for rural practice. The current Bachelor of Midwifery offers three pathways of study to enable students with no previous nursing experience, registered nurses and registered midwives to gain the degree. The length of time for each degree differs however all students have to reach a certain level of competence as accredited by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC). A background for this course will be presented that demonstrates the need for flexible education programs.

Eleven years ago the first three-year Bachelor of Midwifery program commenced in five Australian universities, with Flinders University being one of the pioneers. This new program brought with it pedagogical unknowns and with this came unknown expectations about how and what these graduates would be able to do. There were many who were sceptical and believed that because they were not nurses first they would not be able to practice efficiently and effectively and serve the needs of the local community. The scepticism of the public and their perception of ‘nurses first’ will be challenged.

The students require a professional experience placement as part of their education degree. The clinical hours and the requirement for the student to complete twenty continuity of care experiences with women is mandated by the ANMAC. Some students choose to undertake a rural placement, but this is not always as easy in practice as it is on paper. The challenges for professional experience placement will be presented.

Fast forward eleven years and Flinders University has pioneered the first, and at the present time, only postgraduate course to prepare eligible midwives to prescribe medication. The first cohort has graduated and have now achieved status with the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). They have their names on pathology forms and on script pads. But what does this mean for them and are they able to truly be employed and perform to their scope of practice as defined by the International Council of Midwives (ICM)?

There are different models of midwifery care evident in practice. Are these models what they are ‘cracked up’ to be? The answer to this will be in the presentation.

This presentation will explore the education of the midwife for rural practice. The issues and challenges will be presented and a way forward for the future will be suggested.