How integrated medical student placements in rural communities can be a win-win

Michele Daly¹, David Perkins¹, Christopher Roberts², Koshila Kumar³
¹Broken Hill Department of Rural Health, University of Sydney, ²Sydney Medical School—Northern, University of Sydney, ³Office of Medical Education, Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney

Aims: From the perspective of medical students and health professionals, we hoped to understand the benefits of integrated medical placements when they are delivered in rural and remote settings.

Methods: Qualitative data, collected using semi-structured interviews with students, their supervisors and other health clinicians in a rural and remote setting, were analysed using framework analysis.

Relevance: With major increases in the number of medical students and critical workforce shortages in the bush, the opportunity to develop doctors who are capable and interested in working in rural and remote settings has never been so strong. This research is designed to look at how we can enhance and optimise student learning opportunities in the bush and potentially promote rural career intention at the same time as providing authentic benefit to the local community.

Results: Benefits were identified that related to three distinct groups: the medical student community, the medical professional community and the local community. Medical students on integrated rural placements gain unique clinical, professional and cultural learning opportunities that are not necessarily available to their peers on specialist urban rotations. Local medical professionals gain opportunities for professional development through supervisory roles and mentoring opportunities, as well as support from students taking on pseudo-intern roles. The local community appears to benefit from ‘young blood’ being injected into the fabric of the wider community. This helps bolster a positive community vibe as well as providing role models to the youth community. With more medical students considering a rural career, there is the potential to help alleviate future work shortages leading to better patient outcomes in the long term.

Conclusions: When medical students head out to the bush on extended rural placements it is a win for the student community, a win for the medical
professional community and an important win for the broader local community.