Resilient rural clinicians: role models for medical students

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It has been argued that medical students need to be prepared for the challenges they face, not only in practice, but also during training itself, and that addressing and maintaining one’s mental health and wellbeing should become a lifelong focus for all medical students. This study seeks to understand how rurally located program administrators develop personal resilience and how they promote the growth of resilience in medical students on an individual and collective level. For the purpose of this study, resilience is defined as ‘a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma’ (Luthar et al 2000).

The Parallel Rural Community Curriculum (PRCC) is a longitudinal integrated clinical training program at Flinders University in which medical students undertake a 40-week rural placement for their first clinical year. Each PRCC site is administrated by two non-faculty staff that have a unique role encompassing role modelling, mentoring and providing pastoral care to a small group of students during the academic year. These administrators are also important in setting the context and the culture of the PRCC, and have their own resilience tested by the unique challenges they face.

Participants have been recruited through purposeful sampling of past and current PRCC medical students, PRCC administrators and clinical educators across the four Flinders University Rural Clinical Schools. The qualitative data will be obtained through semi-structured interviews. All participant transcripts will be coded and analysed using the grounded theory approach aiming for theoretical saturation and utilising the NVivo 10 software.

The best educational setting for promoting resilience is thought to be one that enhances socialisation between peers and other adults, facilitates goal setting, monitors student wellbeing and provides positive role models. Understanding how PRCC administrators develop and role model resilience and thereby contribute to the development of student resilience is important to ensure academic success and professional development of the future PRCC cohort and sustainability of the program.