Primary Care Partnerships in rural Western Australia: nurse practitioners leading the way

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Aims: To enhance access to effective multidisciplinary primary care for people with chronic complex conditions living in rural and remote areas in the southern inland catchment of Western Australia.

Methods: Under the Southern Inland Health Initiative, funded by Royalties for Regions, primary care nurse practitioners have been subcontracted through Silver Chain to work in close coordination with local public and private health providers, especially general practitioners and the regional country health services. They plan and coordinate clients’ care and monitor key health indicators to enhance seamless access to appropriate treatment options for chronic complex conditions in order to maximise wellness and prevent/reduce hospitalisations. Telemedicine innovations, including electronic health records and home-based self-monitoring systems aimed at enhancing chronic disease management, are being used as part of an evaluated trial with appropriate clients.

Relevance: This will ensure that rural and remote West Australians have greater access to affordable and timely local health care, thereby enabling them to stay within their local communities while ensuring better health outcomes. Nurse practitioners having access to relevant technology will enable timely and local diagnosis and care planning.

Results and conclusions: This partnership has enabled the development of a new service delivery model to enhance health care to rural and remote Australians and will inform the rollout of the NP role nationally. The first year of operation has resulted in successful establishment of the role in one district, which will now be rolled out to three additional districts over the next four years. The importance of the leadership and change facilitation activities of the nurse practitioner have been recognised at the prestigious 2012 WA Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards by her winning the Emerging Leader award.