Retirement of nursing and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia

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Background: What keeps nurses and allied health professionals working in rural and remote Australia?

While substantial literature exists regarding issues affecting retention of medical practitioners, there is a dearth of research among nurses and allied health professionals, particularly in an Australian rural and remote setting.

The Rural Health Professionals Program (RHPP) is a new workforce scheme designed to increase the allied health and nursing workforce in rural and remote Australia.

RHPP is an initiative of Health Workforce Australia (HWA), which is funding rural workforce agencies (RWAs) to attract and recruit allied health professionals from Australian metropolitan and approved overseas locations.

Each RWA is responsible for identifying vacancies within their jurisdiction and providing a fully case managed recruitment service to eligible candidates, including retention support for up to two years.

The national rollout of this program in 2012 provides an opportunity to undertake independent research among both locally and overseas-trained professionals currently working in rural and remote Australia.

Aims: The overall objective of this project is to identify factors related to the retention of nurses and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia.

The project is collaborative, with involvement from three rural workforce agencies, a peak body and an Australian university.

In addition to accessing a range of allied health professionals, this multi-agency involvement will facilitate comparisons between regions of varying levels of ‘remoteness’.

Methods: A three-phase research program is being undertaken involving:

- Phase 1—a qualitative phase of n=15 face to face in-depth interviews among nursing and allied health professionals placed under the RHPP in three Australian states/territories
  - the purpose of this phase is to uncover in depth the range of issues potentially impacting on retention of nursing and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia.
• Phase 2—a quantification of the issues identified through Phase 1, conducted online among n=75 nursing and allied health professionals. All professionals placed under the RHPP in the three states/territories will be emailed a survey.

• Phase 3—semi-structured telephone exit interviews among nursing and allied health professionals when they leave their RHPP-supported position.

Results and conclusions: This paper will deliver an outline of the study, its methodology and the findings from Phase 1 (which is being conducted in late 2012). At the time of preparing this abstract results were unavailable.