Reaching ‘in’ remote technologies and service delivery in rural and remote communities

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Often rural and remote communities are too small to support traditional models of health delivery locally, so residents must access care from larger urban centres. Unfortunately, access to health services provided in larger centres remains a problem for many residents of isolated settlements. In many cases, their inability to access health services when required results in health needs not being adequately met, lack of continuity of care and an absence of monitoring of the effectiveness of services in terms of health outcomes. It is clear that ‘models of care in rural and remote areas must differ from those in metropolitan communities, incorporating strategies to account for these problems. WHFS has endeavoured to develop a service delivery model which challenged the traditional delivery methods by developing an innovative and creative program which attempted to meet communities’ specific needs and gaps in service provision.

After extensive planning and consultation with key stakeholders, including Community Resource Centres across WA, Regional Commissions, Regional women’s health centres, WA country health and the Department of Regional Development and Lands, WHFS launched its Rural in Reach Program. The first of its kind in WA, the program uses the latest video conferencing communication technology, to deliver long distance one-on-one counselling, family consultations and group education sessions with trained professionals to over thirty rural towns across WA.

Nearing a year of service provision the program is now set to expand to 60 rural communities at the beginning of 2013. Major successes of the program include the continued engagement, trust and relationship building that has developed between the Rural in Reach Program staff and the participating CRCs. Through consultation and feedback, challenges presented have not been seen as a barrier but as an opportunity to ensure that the program is consistently evolving to meet community needs.

The objectives of the WHFS Rural In Reach program are to:

• increase access for rural and remote women to specialised women’s health and family services and community education
• increase training and support for local workers and agencies
• increase collaboration between local services and specialised women’s health services
• support the development of Community Resource Centres as community hubs that can link people with the right service at the right time.

The program has been operating since April 2012 and is now available in 41 rural and remote towns and 3 regional women’s health centres. In the first 12 months there have been:

• over 444 client contacts
• 35 clients accessing individual/family counselling support services
• 100% of counselling clients very satisfied/very satisfied with the service
• 1,439 unique visitors to the Rural in Reach Website
• 247+ Online Information Downloads
• 164 You Tube views
... and this is only the first year!

An evaluation of the program is commencing in June 2013 and preliminary results will be available early 2014.

For further details go to www.ruralinreach.org.au or email ruralinreach@whfs.org.au