

## Building recruitment and retention for the remote allied health workforce

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Recruitment and retention of the allied health (AH) workforce to remote areas is problematic. Vacancies and staff turnover result in lower population to professional ratios. Reduced access to AH services disadvantages remote area residents who are known to experience poorer health outcomes.

Recent research has described personality characteristics of the remote and rural health workforce. This original research paper builds on that by analysing the personality characteristics of remote AH professionals together with the construing or beliefs of AH professionals about working in remote areas. Using case studies, it will present a powerful picture of the personal characteristics that might constitute a good fit with the demands of the remote work environment.

**Method:** This study was a national research project using a mixed methods design with two data collection strands. AH professional personality trait data was collected using a standard personality instrument, The Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI). Repertory grid interviews, a structured interview technique from personal construct psychology, investigated the construing of AH professionals about personality characteristics that contribute to work success in remote areas.

**Results:** Three case studies from the larger study will be described and compared. Each represents a different section of the workforce. Two are metropolitan novices, one with and one without, intentions of becoming a remote AH professional. The third case study is an experienced and settled remote AH professional. The TCI trait levels for each case are compared with previously published data and with each other. Harm Avoidance, Persistence and Reward Dependence appear to be influential in recruitment and retention.

The repertory grid data revealed job satisfaction and likelihood of successful remote recruitment by comparison of the case studies' ideal job, their current position and a remote position. Remote work was construed as generalist rather than specialist which potentially undermined career pathways. It required flexibility and a holistic approach, as well as investing in relationships and feeling comfortable with dual roles. The isolation and limited support and supervision were construed as reducing retention of novices.

**Discussion:** This study contributes new information useful for recruitment and retention of the remote AH workforce. It suggests that novices with a pre-disposition to remote work may exhibit traits helpful in managing the work environment successfully but that the stereotype of an unsupported remote work environment may be limiting the potential pool of professionals available for recruitment. Successful retention requires addressing factors that erode job satisfaction.