

## Innovative professional development for primary care nurses— a rural paradigm

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**Introduction:** Primary care nurses working in rural General Practice are quintessential to the Australian Government's model of health care delivery of primary care services. There is a rural workforce shortage of General Practitioners in rural areas resulting in primary care nurses often taking on further workloads.

Primary care nurses employed within the General Practice setting in East Gippsland are required to provide an extensive range of clinical skills to their communities. Management of these presentations requires critical thinking and best practice knowledge.

With the increasing requirement for nursing to maintain skills acquisition and best practice knowledge the primary care nurses in the East Gippsland region with the support of the Monash University, School of Rural Health—Bairnsdale formed a Practice Nurses Education Group (PNEG) to fulfil their professional development needs.

**Aim:** The aims were to:

- initiate and support educational activities for primary care nurses in the region
- encourage performance and knowledge expansion
- strengthen patient safety through reinforcement of knowledge and rehearsal of clinical skills
- provide opportunity for nurses to network and form alliances
- seek linkages to other educational activities that might be advantageous to all.

**Results:** The results showed:

- the workshops were well supported by nurses in East Gippsland
- most nurses who attended had been practicing for more than 20 years
- nurses travelled up to 120kms to attend the education activities

- nurses mostly attended the workshops as an opportunity to network and socialise, refresh clinical skills and remain up to date with contemporary knowledge
- subject matter covered was sufficient, and relevant to their needs
- nurses felt confident in utilising the knowledge and skills learned to implement into their clinical practice.

**Conclusion:** The PNEG program has demonstrated that General Practice nurses in the East Gippsland region have enhanced their knowledge and acquisition of clinical skills for better patient outcomes.

The opportunity to network with other nurses in similar circumstances has generated collaborative learning and formed alliances amongst a group of nurses who tended to work in isolation to each other.

Educational events driven by this group addresses the learning needs of the group, and decreases the times nurses have to travel to metropolitan areas for professional development.

This program is now recognised regionally and formed relationships with other educational providers, resulting in further collaborative education sessions.

The straightforwardness of this program, with support from its members makes this program unique and easily replicated to other rural and remote areas where nurses require further educational activities.