

Improving outcomes in rural/remote communities through development of the gen Y workforce

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Consumer outcomes and experience of mental health care in rural and remote Australia is negatively impacted upon by significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of high performing staff. Furthermore as the workforce rapidly ages, particularly in rural and remote services, the need to recruit and retain staff from generation Y becomes key to not only providing a stable workforce, but also delivering high quality services. Over the course of three years the service undertook a journey of service redevelopment and generational change, which took it from a low performing service with critical recruitment issues, to a high performing service with full staffing and most importantly high levels of consumer satisfaction and outcomes. This journey was undertaken using a strategic plan which focused on the recruitment, development and retention of new staff, proving that rural disadvantage can be overcome in the recruitment and retention of quality staff.

By undertaking process redesign using CORE values as a framework, combined with developing processes aimed at a new generation of workers, new staff are engaged and supported from potential applicant through to high performing employee. The service was able to demonstrate increases in clinical performance and outcomes across a range of clinical quality domains and achieve a sustainable, full staffing profile.

This paper will not only discuss how over the space of three years a small rural and remote mental health service became a leader in recruitment, retention and subsequently patient care, outperforming not only its rural counterparts but also its metropolitan ones across human resource and patient outcome measures, but it will also discuss the many learnings and insights gained in regards to building and developing the rapidly growing generation Y workforce. The learnings, whilst gained in the context of a small rural/remote mental health service, are readily transferable across all manner of health services, both rural and urban. The paper will also discuss recommendations based in this learning for future policy regarding developing and supporting the rural workforce. Most importantly, this paper will demonstrate very clear links and provide discussion and learnings regarding improving health outcomes through getting staff recruitment, retention and development right and makes a strong argument for increased focus on this area as a key strategy for improving health outcomes for rural and remote communities.