

Outback Intern Pharmacist Training Program: a future in rural and remote practice

Selina Taylor

Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health, QLD

Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health (MICRRH) has designed and implemented an innovative response to the pharmacist maldistribution issue by developing the first rural and remote Intern Pharmacist program in Australia.

Building a pharmacy workforce in the bush necessitates addressing the impact of the high cost of living, education and support and the perceived lack of professional opportunities.

The MICRRH Intern Program aims to address barriers and prepare intern pharmacists for a successful career as a 'rural generalist pharmacist' in the remote workforce. The MICRRH program provides interns with a rurally focused approach that supplements the mandatory prescribed intern training program.

The program consists of three major areas; accommodation assistance, focused education and preparation for intern examinations and integration in multidisciplinary teams.

Intern pharmacists meet fortnightly with the Pharmacy Academic and a member from an allied health setting for an interactive, participatory teaching and learning opportunity. Allied health practitioners discuss their discipline with the interns and how their field relates to pharmacy practice. Interns share pharmacy-specific information with the allied health practitioners tailored to their discipline. Sessions are designed to promote open discussion and practical information sharing with the aim to better prepare pharmacists to work within rural multidisciplinary teams. An additional benefit of this program is that allied health practitioners are upskilled on medications and the pharmacist role.

Five intern pharmacists have successfully completed the program over two years. Their practice demonstrates the importance of networking with allied health teams. Feedback indicates the program fills a gap in undergraduate training resulting in an enhanced understanding of the roles, function and capacity of allied health professionals and the importance of interprofessional approaches for optimal patient care. Further, they develop the skills and confidence as a pharmacist to integrate into multidisciplinary teams to improve patient outcomes in a rural and remote context. Of the five pharmacists who completed the program, all five have been retained as practicing pharmacists in outback Queensland, in an area equally or more remote than Mount Isa.

The MICRRH intern program highlights the importance of interprofessional teaching and learning models, structured examination preparation, and accommodation support. The intern pharmacist year is an ideal time for pharmacists to create networks and enhance their knowledge of multidisciplinary care. The intern program better equips pharmacists to work as a 'rural generalist pharmacist' and provides an important component of the pharmacy workforce pipeline.