Patient perceptions of the role and skills of their health care professionals: implications for innovative and sustainable rural and remote primary health care delivery

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Abstract

Objective
This study explored patient perceptions of their local rural primary health care professionals and the factors which contributed to these perceptions in the context of sustainable innovative rural primary health care delivery.

Design
A qualitative case study design was used. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 43 patients and combined with contextual information, including local and visiting services and the history of the health service in the community.

Setting
Four discrete rural and remote services (RRMAs 5-7); namely solo nurse-led model, solo GP models (with and without a local hospital) and a Multipurpose Health Service.

Results
Overall, 3 factors influenced perceptions; namely (i) patient age; (ii) patient exposure to, and experiences of health care (iii) the longevity of Primary health care professional in community.

Patients described their care in terms of their relationship with long standing primary health care professionals, and the knowledge health care professionals had of the community rather than patients’ perceptions of clinical skills. Long term residency of the primary health care professional was valued highly; regardless of the type health care discipline. The role of practice nurses and allied health professionals were not well understood.

Conclusion
These perceptions may influence patients’ acceptance of innovative and other non GP-led models of care, particularly in communities with a history of GP-led services. Community education on the role and function of allied health professionals will assist their appropriate and optimal use in rural health service settings.

Keywords: primary health care, patient perceptions, rural and remote, innovation