Action on Nursing in Rural and Remote Areas—aka Rural and Remote Nursing Summit, Project or Forum

David Lindsay, Chair of Project Committee

PREAMBLE

Undertakings of the magnitude inherent within this National project are invariably characterised by significant “signposts” along the way, and the above Conference constituted one such marker. This short article provides an account of the Symposium organised and facilitated by representatives of the three national nursing organisations that have driven the project to date, namely the Association for Australian Rural Nurses (AARN), the Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANA) and the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF). These nursing member bodies of the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) could not have embarked upon or progressed such a project without the substantial support of staff within the Alliance, Ms Joan Lipscombe, consultant, other member bodies of the NRHA, State and Commonwealth Governments and the many other national nursing organisations that are represented on the Project Committee.

Evidenced throughout this Project has been the central role that consultation and collaboration have played, and it is fair to say that much new ground has been broken as a result. In particular, the voices of rural and remote nurses, consumers and Indigenous groups have been sought and listened to, as the Committee have endeavoured to ensure that action is based upon the realities experienced by these people.

The following timeline of events was presented at the Symposium, as many of those present were unfamiliar with this “journey”.

2001 — recommendation from the 6th NRHA Conference that a Rural and Remote Nursing “Summit” be held, to explore priority issues and initiate action pertaining to this workforce.

October 2001 — initiative taken up by the 3 nursing organisations within the NRHA ie AARN, CRANA and the ANF, in conjunction with ACDN, ANC Inc., CATSIN, RCNA, NRHA, NRHN and the Chief Nursing Officers. A glossary of the acronyms used within this article is included by way of explanation for readers—essential in this day and age of acronym usage (DAAU!).

David Lindsay, the then President of AARN agreed to Chair the Committee. All member bodies of the NRHA were and continue to be strongly supportive and interested in the Summit concept and process.
October 23, 2001 — first teleconference held of the Organising Committee. Terms of Reference developed, proposed date and venue for the “summit” identified (1-2 July, in Adelaide) and potential funding sources (principally Commonwealth and State governments) targeted.

November - December 2001 — Draft Background paper developed, 4 working parties established, advertising and promotion commenced.


- media releases put out re Summit
- draft list of attendees generated
- specific goals and outcomes identified
- summit program drafted and facilitator sought
- face-to-face meeting of Organising Committee held 15 March, NRHA.

April 2002 — Draft recommendations and Outcomes/Vision Statement developed, to complement background paper.

Summit referred to AHCMA and AHWOC

May-July 2002 — due to a variety of factors, the summit postponed until October, and linked to Alliance CouncilFest.

July - October 2002 — Funding received from Commonwealth (Office of Rural Health) to assist with running of the (newly named) Forum, principally to support costs of travel for delegates from all over Australia

Three documents refined for presentation at the Forum:

- Action on Nursing in R&R Areas – Issues Paper
- Action on Nursing in R&R Areas – Required conditions/Outcomes
- Action on Nursing in R&R Areas – Key Recommendations for Action

18 October — National Rural and Remote Area Nursing Forum held in Canberra. Facilitated by Ms Margaret Conley, and attended by over 100 delegates, covering the breadth of individuals and groups, government and non-government, who have a stake in nursing in R&R areas. Substantial financial support provided by the Office of Rural Health in the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. Key representatives from this Department present at the Forum voiced their support for this process.

Very successful day and very positive feedback received.

Linked to Review of Nursing Education and Senate Inquiry.

Set of recommendations developed by delegates at the Forum, and 7 prioritised as most urgent.

November 2002 — 7-point Action Plan developed out of the Forum — circulated widely.
Ongoing commitment to implementation of the action Plan gained from AARN, CRANA, ANF.

NRHA confirm nursing issues as a priority for next 12-18 months

RHSET grant proposals developed

*January 2003 – current*

Financial Report sent to the Australian Department of Health and Ageing

2003 timeline developed

Symposium proposed for the 7th National Rural Health Conference.

Following the presentation of this timeline, the priority recommendations were presented, and feedback sought from those present at the Symposium. This was a useful process, and allowed some further refinement to take place. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, those present could not do more work. However, the presenters came away feeling that the symposium had achieved its aims, and that there was consensus that the project had been on track throughout.

There is a solid commitment from the National Nursing organisations and the NRHA to continue this project throughout 2003–04. As Chair of the Committee, I look forward to being able to report to the 8th National Rural Health Conference on progress achieved in the interim. Information about the Project can be accessed via the AARN or NRHA websites.

**GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS**

AARN—Association for Australian Rural Nurses, Inc.

ACDN—Australian Council of Deans of Nursing

AHMAC—Australian Health Ministers Advisory Committee

AHWOC—Australian Health Workforce Officials Committee

ANC—Australian Nursing Council

ANF—Australian Nursing Federation

CATSIN—Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses

CRANA—Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia

NRHA—National Rural Health Alliance

NRHN—National Rural Health Network

RCNA—Royal College of Nursing, Australia
PRESENTER

David Lindsay is a registered nurse with a substantial clinical background in all aspects of general nursing and critical care. He moved from the clinical environment into education, which initiated a long and enjoyable connection with rural nurses and rural nursing issues, principally via the processes of continuing and tertiary education. He was employed as a member of the rural nursing continuing education unit in South Australia for ten years commencing in the late 80s. Currently he is the Director of the Nursing Degree Program at James Cook University, Queensland. Based in Townsville, Queensland, he is responsible for the undergraduate program at Townsville, Cairns and commencing in 2003, Thursday Island.

David has been an executive member of the Association for Australian Rural Nurses (AARN) for many years, and represented the association at many forums and served on many committees linked to rural nursing. He has held the position of National President of AARN from 2000–2001, and currently is the Immediate Past President. He is currently Chair of the Project Committee focusing upon achieving action on rural and remote nursing issues in Australia, and also represents the AARN on the Commonwealth-funded Postgraduate Scholarship Committee. He is the AARN representative on the National Rural Health Alliance Council, and continues to have a fervent commitment to rural nursing and rural health issues.

David has recently been a member of a team involved in several WHO consultancies within Fiji. These projects involved an evaluation of the nurse practitioner role in Fiji, and delivery of a post-RN degree to 25 Fijian registered nurses, to update them to a degree qualification. In 2003 he will continue his involvement in further WHO consultancies in the south-west Pacific.

David is currently undertaking a PhD, focusing upon nurse practitioner roles within the south-west Pacific region.