

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

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Abstract Title: Murrumbidgee Local Health District Physiotherapy Rural Generalist Training Program

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Background: There is difficulty recruiting Physiotherapists to rural areas and in Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) there were three long term Senior Sole Practitioner Physiotherapy vacancies in outer regional towns. It was therefore difficult to meet the service needs of the communities in both the inpatient and community settings. Also, MLHD sole practitioners have reported a lack of discipline specific professional support which has had implications on staff retention.

Approach: Three vacant sole practitioner Senior Level 3 Physiotherapy positions in Outer Regional Towns were converted to three temporary two year Level 1/ 2 Rural Generalist Training Program Physiotherapy positions. This opened the positions up to early career professionals. The difference in funding was used to employ a Senior Level 4 Rural Generalist Training Program Physiotherapist who has the role of supporting the training positions.

The training positions have four areas of priority including Physiotherapy service development, extended scope of practice where relevant, use of Allied Health Assistants and other support workers, and use of telehealth. The Level 1/ 2 Physiotherapists have up to 20% of their time allocated to professional development and service development activities. This ensures the therapists have time allocated to acquire the broad general Physiotherapy skills to treat the variety of clients that present in a rural setting.

The program is a first for NSW and is based on a model used in other states, such as QLD. The Rural Generalist Physiotherapists also have the opportunity to participate in further Rural Generalist training through James Cook University.

Outcomes / Results: All Rural Generalist Training Program Physiotherapy positions were filled in early 2017. Regular support for the early career professionals is able to be provided both face to face and via telehealth across all work days. Extensive professional development opportunities have been able to be provided to the training physiotherapists to develop their skills. The Senior Physiotherapist has assisted with service development initiatives that meet the priorities for MLHD. Patients requiring Physiotherapy are able to access a service closer to home.

Take Home Message: Providing dedicated discipline specific support and professional development opportunities for isolated early career Physiotherapists
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