

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

2017 NSW RURAL HEALTH AND RESEARCH CONGRESS

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Concurrent Stream: I) Rural Workforce – Sustain, Maintain, Gain

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Abstract Title: Overcoming the “too busy, too poor... too rural” perception: organisational strategies for rural research training.

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Background: There is opportunity to bring research into the everyday world of rural health staff via workplace-based training. However, research skill building will only be of benefit to individuals and their organisations if the right training is delivered to the right people, focusing on the right skills to answer organisationally-relevant research questions. This study explored the perceptions of health staff and key informants within one large rural health organisation, which was ready to implement research related change, to determine what value was placed on research and research training within the organisation and the organisation’s present and future needs for research training.

Approach: This qualitative study was underpinned by a critical realist perspective. Individual interviews (n=7) with purposively selected key informants from a single rural organisation’s board, executive and facility management and focus groups with a convenience sample of health staff with interests in research (n=11) were conducted. Data was analysed using an iterative process, with initial coding followed by thematic analysis. Critical realism allowed exploration of the organisational, cultural and structural contexts of research training (structure) as well as the ability of individuals to act within these contexts (agency).

Outcomes / Results: Five emerging themes paint a picture of an organisation looking to:

- strategically overcome an organisational culture of “too busy, too poor... too rural to research”.

- put tangible coordination and support systems in place to coordinate research activity and access to research information.
- initially target those with an interest for training, regardless of their profession.
- take ownership of training, which is workplace-led, but collaborate closely with university partners for specialist expertise.
- address cultural and structural barriers, including perceptions that “secret research business” is unattainable by most staff members.

Analysis continues and themes will be refined prior to the Congress.

Take Home Message: This study demonstrates that a rural organisation seeking to embrace research will need to overcome existing workplace cultural perceptions. Carefully coordinated support, collaboration for training and building on the interest of those already enthusiastic will position the organisation to take the first steps for building research capability into the future.