**Abstract**

**Congress Stream:** Technology in healthcare: innovation in action

**Presentation title:** Rural Innovations Changing Healthcare (RICH) – A Virtual Forum

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**500 Word Abstract**

**Background:**

There are many barriers that impact recruitment and retention of staff in rural areas, including geographic and professional isolation, the need for broad competencies due to generalist roles, lack of backfill relief and costs of travel and accommodation to access professional development opportunities. These barriers affect the ability to meet Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements for National Registration purposes.

A needs assessment conducted by the NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation (ACI) Rural Health Network recognised the need for local health districts and other rural health service providers to share projects, resources and lessons that inspire health improvement across rural NSW. It also showed that geographically-isolated clinicians needed a better way of accessing CPD opportunities.

**Approach:**

The Rural Innovations Changing Healthcare (RICH) Forum is an annual virtual conference and the first of its kind in NSW. It uses Telehealth, live webstreaming and social media technology to connect 18 rural health sites across NSW, providing sites with an opportunity to showcase health innovations and share clinical and workforce redesign projects that improve patient care.

The RICH Forum attracts 200 delegates and involves no travel, accommodation or registration fees. Clinicians can network locally, while connecting with colleagues across the state. It also allows participants to schedule work commitments around sessions of relevance and actively participate in discussions on social media in real time. Certificates of attendance are provided to each participant for CPD purposes.

Despite its innovative location, the RICH Forum is modelled on traditional conferences, with a theme, keynote speaker and call for abstracts. Oral presentations take place throughout the day, with ePosters and other resources available on each topic. An ePoster slideshow is presented during the lunch break, to showcase innovations with potential to be implemented in other health services across NSW.

**Outcomes:**

On average, over the last four years the RICH Forum is attended by 200 delegates across a range of health services. The only cost to the ACI is catering for live sites, at an affordable cost per head of $10. In 2016, Western Australia and South Australia Country Health staff joined the RICH Forum by live webstreaming, spreading the value of the forum nationally.

The value of social media in promoting the event and sharing lessons learned in real time is enjoyed by all participants, with 518 Tweets and 300,000 impressions on Twitter during the 2015 event, as well as 43 national and international conversations. All presentations are loaded onto the ACI Innovation Exchange as a central repository for innovation and clinical redesign. The ACI Innovation Exchange now hosts over 200 projects, many of which are rural innovations.

**Take Home Message:**

The RICH Forum is a simple, cost-effective and scalable way to reduce silos in the healthcare system and reduce duplication and unwarranted clinical variation across regions and professions. It uses existing technology to build staff capability and achieve CPD requirements, while eliminating the human resource and financial costs of travel.

The RICH Forum is a model that can be replicated across many sectors where geographic and professional isolation are factors that impact recruitment, retention and skills acquisition.