

Agricultural health and medicine—a multidisciplinary approach to educating tomorrow’s rural and remote health leaders

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Australian agricultural populations have higher rates of injury and illness and poorer health outcomes than people living in large rural towns and urban environments. The reasons underlying this imbalance include limited access to insufficient rural and remote medical resources, access to fewer trained health professionals and the inherent dangers of the agricultural lifestyle.

In light of these facts, it is important that rural and remote professionals from both health and non-health backgrounds are educated on the importance of health, safety and wellbeing in the agricultural workforce. Without healthy, happy and sustainable agricultural communities, the agricultural sector in Australia will not be able to meet the food and fibre needs of an increasingly demanding global populace.

To date, Australia has not had university-level training specifically focused on improving the physical and mental health of Australian agricultural workers. The National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH), in conjunction with the School of Medicine at Deakin University and Western District Health Service, has recently delivered the first interdisciplinary professional training course that specifically tackles these issues.

This revolutionary training uses modern adult learning techniques and a progressive curriculum to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills to make a difference to the health of farm men and women across Australia. The course also enables an environment where strong intersectoral relationships are developed, positively influencing the health practices of participants. This paper will summarise the key insights of the inaugural course, highlight key points of the student experience and outline plans to roll-out further training to relevant health and non-health professionals across Australia.

