

The future health workforce: what is it going to take to get them out bush?

Shannon Nott^{1,2}

¹National Rural Health Students' Network, ²University of NSW

Shannon Nott is currently a sixth-year medical student studying at the University of New South Wales' Rural Clinical School in Albury-Wodonga. Having grown up on a sheep, cattle and cropping property near Dunedoo in central-west NSW, Shannon is truly a country boy at heart. Since getting into medical school Shannon has been active in rural health promotion at a local, regional and national level. He has been lucky enough to have Co-Chaired the National Rural Health Students' Network (NRHSN) twice in both 2008 and 2010, a role which he thoroughly enjoyed. He was also the Rural and Indigenous Officer for the Australian Medical Students' Association in 2009. During his time with the NRHSN he has participated in many rural high school visits, Indigenous festivals and other local opportunities to talk about rural health to young people living in rural and remote communities. He also worked closely with the Australian Medical Students' Association in 2010 to produce Australia's inaugural National Rural Leadership Development Seminar, a forum designed to upskill and session plan for new leaders to enter rural and remote regions of Australia.

Shannon has also had the privilege of speaking at various conferences on health reform in particular in regards to rural and remote health. He has been a keynote speaker at conferences including the National University Rural Health Conference, the Addressing the Healthcare Skills Crisis Summit and Reforming Australia's Health Workforce Summit.

In 2007, following the Albury National Rural Health Conference, Shannon developed the inaugural Rural Appreciation Weekend, a program designed to entice students to rural and remote Australia through a positive first hand experience in a rural setting. This program has now seen over 400 students participate from medical, nursing and allied health backgrounds and has attracted much media attention, including ABC's Landline program in 2010.

Shannon's work in rural and remote health has seen him awarded Australian Student Leader of the Year 2009, Medical Student of the Year 2009 and a finalist for NSW Young Australian of the Year in 2010.

Context

Incentives that currently exist to recruit and retain young health professionals to the bush have fallen short of achieving their aims. The recent Rural Health Workforce Strategy has added financial incentives aiming to retain current rural health professionals and recruit new ones to the bush; however, few incentives that exist have been directed to the needs of the next generation of rural health professionals. Financial incentives, whilst attractive to new graduates, have not shown to make a real dent in the rural and remote health workforce shortages. Until incentives recognise what current health students want they will not succeed in an area where many other incentive schemes have not.

Objective

To highlight what strategies can be put in place at local, regional and national levels to recruit and retain health students into rural areas of Australia after graduation. This abstract will highlight the importance of understanding the needs of 'Generation Y' in establishing recruitment and retention programs to address workforce distribution in Australia. Furthermore this paper will discuss how we can make rural health 'Gen Y friendly' and what infrastructure needs to be in place for this to happen.

Key messages

- Highlight what aspects of rural health are attractive to future health professionals.
- Highlight what Generation Y wants out of a post-university career and how these desires translate into incentives.
- How to promote rural health to Generation Y whilst at university.
- Financial vs non-financial incentives—the balance between the two for Generation Y.
- The importance of work–life balance for current students.
- The barriers stopping students going to rural areas and how to overcome these barriers.

- The views of Generation Y in regards to interprofessional health care and how this can be used for retention.

Conclusion

To be able to bridge the gap in terms of workforce shortages in Australia we need to look at the wants and needs of our next generation of health professionals, and make inroads to meet these. Establishing 'balanced' workplace environments for students with adequate infrastructure to give graduates access to ongoing professional development are key steps in beginning to recruit and retain young health professionals into the bush.

