Rural training pathway needed for nurses and allied health professionals

Better training pathways and promotion are needed to convince more nurses and allied health professionals to go rural, according to a new study released today.

“Nursing and allied health professionals such as physiotherapists and psychologists are critical to meeting the health needs of rural and remote Australians,” says Dr Ross Maxwell, Chair of Rural Health Workforce Australia (RHWA) which commissioned the study in collaboration with Monash University Department of Rural Health, University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health, and the Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs.

“We believe this report is timely given the Australian Government’s greater emphasis on the role of Australian-trained graduates in addressing maldistribution of health workforce in rural Australia.

“One of the core building blocks of a better rural workforce pipeline is the new Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program, with a renewed focus on nursing and allied health students.”

This dovetails with key findings of the RHWA-Universities study which explored the attitudes of 36 students and 34 recent nursing and allied health graduates from Adelaide, Darwin, Melbourne and Newcastle.

Researchers found these young professionals were heavily influenced by positive clinical and personal rural experiences, including a sense of connection to people, place and community.

Among the report’s recommendations are:

- A structured rural graduate program for allied health, similar to that offered for medicine and nursing
- Positive marketing of rural careers as professionally rewarding, with solid ‘generalist’ foundations for clinical practice
- Financial support for accommodation and transport to enable more nursing and allied health students to undertake rural and remote training placements
- Encourage urban universities to increase their intake of nursing and allied health students from country areas, given that rural origin is an important determinant of future rural practice

Dr Maxwell says these recommendations also reflect the views of future rural health leaders at the National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) which is managed by RHWA.

“The NRHSN has more than 10,000 members studying medicine, nursing and allied health and is a valuable lens for policy makers into what matters for Australia’s future health workforce,” he says.

Download a copy from the RHWA website of “Heck Yes” – Understanding the Decision to Relocate Rural Amongst Urban Nursing and Allied Health Students and Recent Graduates.

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