

National Rural Health Alliance E-forum – 24 May 2002

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From: Gordon Gregory [gg@ruralhealth.org.au]
Subject: 'Whither rural health?'

The first issue of the Australian Journal of Rural Health for 2002 (Vol 10 Number 1) includes an article entitled 'Whither rural health? Reviewing a decade of progress in rural health'. It is written by John Humphreys, Desley Hegney (Foundation Editor of the AJRH), Joan Lipscombe, Gordon Gregory and Bruce Chater. It provides an overview of events in rural and remote health since the 1st National Rural Health Conference, held in Toowoomba in 1991. The detailed article reports that much progress has been made, including on workforce issues, and that greater attention should now be paid to a population health approach and to encouraging changes in attitudes and behaviours that impact on health outcomes. It proposes some 'mottos' for rural health activities: think health status; think system; think long term, act short term; think community; think whole-of-health; and think genuine partnership between governments, providers and communities. For subscriptions to the AJRH call Blackwell Publishing Asia on 03 9247 0300 or info@blacksci-asia.com.au or, for Blackwell Synergy (journals online) go to <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com>

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From: Gordon Gregory [gg@ruralhealth.org.au]
Subject: AIHW work on rural health

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is doing work that will result in reports of great value to those interested in rural and remote health. The work is being supported by the Federal Office of Rural Health. It will result in four reports:

- * a Framework for Rural Health Information;
- * a report on mortality among rural, regional and remote Australians;
- * a report on injury as a cause of death in rural and remote Australia (including reference to MVAs, suicide, falls, drowning and violence); and

* a report on the status of data sets and availability against the Framework.

The work is being undertaken by a small team led by Andrew Phillips and Toni O'Brien in the AIHW's Economics and Business Services Division. Later e-forums will keep readers informed of progress and of the future availability of reports from this important work.

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From: Gordon Gregory [gg@ruralhealth.org.au]
Subject: 2002 Federal Budget

The following is a summary of an analysis of the Federal Budget by the Executive Director of the Alliance, provided to Council Members on 15 May.

It is very hard to provide an accurate view of the Budget, and its real place in the Grand Scheme of Things, when the media are only interested in what was newly-announced last night. But the recent history of rural and remote health funding provides a great opportunity to clarify some things.

Any particular single Budget impacts on the margins. There are four new initiatives announced in the health and ageing areas that relate to rural areas. But they are dwarfed by the new money that will flow to three areas of activity in the coming financial year by decisions made in Budget 2000 (two years ago). They are the program for new general practice registrars, the University Departments of Rural and Remote Health and the Clinical Schools; and the Regional Health Services Program.

So the financial future for some issues in rural and remote health was set for four years in May 2000. The job is to see that these programs are working well on the ground, to evaluate them, and to use their lessons for other areas not yet covered. We need to be gearing up for the period after June 2004 when the money currently allocated to these programs runs out. By then there will also be a new Australian Health Care Agreement, providing the framework and the funds for public hospitals in all jurisdictions.

Moderator's Comment:

The Alliance's media statement on the Budget is available at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/14502.htm> and is reprinted below.

Budget information from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing is available at <http://www.health.gov.au/budget2002/index.htm>. Budget information from the Department of Transport and Regional Services is available at <http://www.dotrs.gov.au/dept/budget/>

For other Budget reaction

* the statement by the Rural Doctors Association is available at
http://www.rdaa.com.au/rural_health_-_the_cure_is_still_a_long_way_off.htm

* AMA statements are available at
<http://domino.ama.com.au/AMASWeb/MediaRel.nsf/Media?OpenView>

* The Budget statement by the Australian Nursing Federation is available at
http://www.anf.org.au/news_media/news_press_020515.html

* The statement by Federal Opposition health spokesperson, Stephen Smith, is available at
<http://www.alp.org.au/media/0502/ssdsbud150502.html>.

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From: Gordon Gregory [gg@ruralhealth.org.au]

Subject: Action on Nursing in Rural and Remote Areas - Revised Project Outline and Timeline

'Action on Nursing in Rural and Remote Areas' is a 2-3 year project to ensure that rural and remote issues are appropriately placed in developments underway nationally with respect to nursing issues. These issues relate to nursing recruitment; education and training; retention and support; scope of practice; and practice environments.

The Project is to encourage and facilitate a national approach to these issues while at the same time recognising the major responsibilities and the significant developments achieved within particular State and Territory jurisdictions. The welcome establishment of national programs for undergraduate, post-graduate and re-entry scholarships provides a good example of the valuable role for national leadership.

A suite of activities will be required to meet the aims of the Project. The general sequence of activities is as follows:

- 1 development of the national collaboration to run the Project;
- 2 a first draft of the position papers;
- 3 widespread consultation on these draft papers;
- 4 a national meeting to seek agreement on desired future directions among key decision-makers and national leaders of rural and remote nursing;
- 5 a potential series of regional or state-based meetings to seek agreement on future directions and actions among key regional and state leaders; and
- 6 continued reappraisal of required steps forward and barriers to Action on Nursing in Rural and Remote Areas.

Steps 1 and 2 above have been completed and 3 is underway. Comments on the draft documents are encouraged. The papers are available at the "news" section of the Alliance website (<http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>). It is proposed that Step 4 be achieved through a Forum to be held in Canberra in October 2002.

The Project Committee is also considering regional and State-based meetings for the first half of 2003. Step 6 consists of the requirement to continually reappraise the situation for Action on Nursing in Rural and Remote Areas.

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From: Nicky Chirlian [nicola.chirlian@community.nsw.gov.au]

I am looking for contacts/information about successful service models for therapists servicing indigenous communities.

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WELFARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FARM FAMILIES
(Extract from RIRDC on-line)

The objective of this study was to contribute towards improving the mix and delivery of services and programs to meet the welfare needs of farm families undergoing stress, by:

- * providing an overview of the support needs of farm families during times of financial and other stress in farming;
- * describing the agencies, services and programs which are or have recently been available to meet those needs; and
- * proposing ways of closing any gaps in the range of supports available.

In the light of the findings, the current mix of government services available to farmers experiencing adjustment pressure seems better now than in the past. Our research has identified some apparent gaps in these services, however, especially in non-financial counselling services, and in the range of supports that appear relevant to farm families in transition from the land.

Report summary - <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HCC/02-042sum.html>

Full report - <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HCC/02-042.pdf>

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MEDICAL INDEMNITY CRISIS TAKES ITS TOLL ON RURAL COMMUNITIES

"Current uncertainties around UMP mean rural communities, particularly in NSW, are about to face a dramatic drop in the provision of medical services. Many rural doctors, who are under tremendous pressure due to the uncertainty of their indemnity cover, are being forced to reconsider their options to continue to provide medical services to their communities" Dr Ken Mackey, National President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) said recently.

The full text of Dr Mackey's statement is available at <http://www.rdaa.com.au/ump.htm>

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NT INDIGENOUS HEALTH PLAN

"The Australian" newspaper of 22 May 2002 reported that Aborigines will get direct control over health funding in the Northern Territory under revolutionary reforms designed to confront a situation the Territory Government says has left the white population "largely healthy" and the indigenous population "largely sick".

Health Minister Jane Aagaard unveiled the plan to create 21 new indigenous health zones across the territory, saying "we have become far too used to" the disparity in health outcomes.

Under the plan, the Commonwealth has agreed to treat remote-area Territorians the same as urban Australians by allocating previously unavailable funds from the Medicare Benefit Fund and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The money will be pooled to be spent on providing doctors and nurses in zones that do not have them.

The full article is available at http://www.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,4057,4364979%255E421,00.html. Ms Aagaard's statement is available at http://www.nt.gov.au/ocm/media_releases/20020521_Indigenous.shtml

The plan was welcomed by the Australian Divisions of General Practice Chair Dr Julie Thompson, who said that "this new plan will provide Indigenous communities with access to a GP and other primary health care services in their local area – services that the rest of Australia takes for granted."

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From: Gordon Gregory [gg@ruralhealth.org.au]
Subject: 'The Outback'

Listen to Background Briefing on Radio National, Tuesday at 7.10pm - especially if you believe that 'The Outback' (however defined) is part of 'rural and remote Australia'. The program is also available from the ABC website at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/bbing/default.htm>

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INTERNET NOT BEST HELP FOR DEPRESSION
(Extract from ABC Health News: 20/5/2002)

Australians prefer to consult their computer rather than their GP if they have depression, and the information they are getting is not always accurate, according to two new studies into the topic. The full story is available at http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/health/HealthRepublsh_558217.htm

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(Extract from "The Update: AuNz Net and Information Industry Briefs", 19 May 2002

Neurosurgeons Tap Net System For Remote Response

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons this week announced a new Internet-based system it says could help with emergencies among people in regional and remote areas.

The new teleradiology system will allow city-based neurosurgeons to see x-rays and scans done in regional and remote centres where expensive, technologically advanced equipment may not be available.

"There is a desperate need for a more effective and inexpensive means to enable rapid response to neurosurgical emergencies from any location including our remote areas and I believe this system goes a great deal towards improving this problem," said Sydney Neurosurgeon, Dr Marcus Stoodley.

"Many neurosurgical emergencies happen in the middle of the night," he added. "By using the Internet system we can use our computers at home to review scans and aid decision-making."

HCN To Boost Medical Search Capability

Health software systems provider Health Communication Network (HCN) last week bought the rights to WorldMedicus and Farseek to boost its medical database search technology.

HCN said GPs will be able to search across multiple knowledge databases from different vendors in one easy step, rather than searching each individually.

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SEVENTH NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE – CALL FOR PAPERS

A Call for Papers has now been made for the Seventh National Rural Health Conference to be held in Hobart in March 2003. The Call for Papers brochure is available at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/seventhconf/callforpapers.htm>. Deadline for receipt of abstracts is 14 June 2002.

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CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

As such, the Alliance does not control postings and the contents do not necessarily reflect

the opinions of the Alliance. Nor do postings necessarily reflect the view of Jim Groves or any organisation he is associated with. Jim Groves can be contacted at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

The e-forum is sent to a mailing list of the Alliance and those have indicated interest through the subscription box at the NRHA Web site (<http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>). This issue is going to 1,144 recipients. Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

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