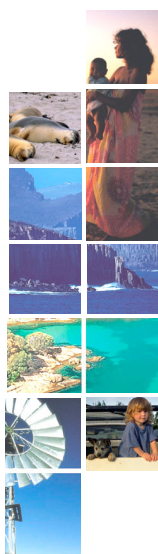


Do medical schools have a role in recruitment and retention? Implementing the evidence at the James Cook University School of Medicine

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing attention is being paid to developing a range of strategies to improve recruitment and retention of rural health professionals. Many of these focus on education, particularly in medicine. Training institutions are under pressure to make changes to selection, teaching and support of students. This paper reviews the available evidence and describes how it is being implemented at the James Cook University School of Medicine.



OVERVIEW

The mission of the James Cook University (JCU) School of Medicine is to train doctors to meet the health needs of Northern Australia with an emphasis on rural, remote, Indigenous and tropical health. The course had its first intake of 64 in 2000. Prior to this, medical education was well developed locally through the North Queensland Clinical School; the Anton Breinl Centre; and the North Queensland Rural Health Training Unit. These organisations and others involved in rural, remote, Indigenous and tropical health contributed to development of the curriculum. Clinical cases were set in rural and remote contexts from week 1, with students exposed to appropriate resources and role models. A multi-disciplinary rural students club and an Indigenous students club were formed. A subject entitled Rural, Remote, Indigenous and Tropical Health was developed for year II which built on earlier material to provide a foundation for these strands throughout the rest of the course. Teaching material was integrated across other subjects and years. Students undertake a minimum of 20 weeks of rural placements over the course, with major nodes in years 2, 4 and 6.

CONCLUSION

Early evaluation suggests students are developing a sound understanding of rural, remote, Indigenous and tropical health, with many considering careers in these fields. Through the strategies outlined the School has undertaken the task of achieving its mission statement. Other significant roles of the school including vertical integration of rural training, and support for rural health professionals contribute to an overall retention strategy. Long-term evaluations will be needed to measure whether this approach is successful in meeting workforce needs.



PRESENTER

Tarun Sen Gupta has worked in medical education in Townsville since 1993. Prior to this he spent six years in remote rural practice in Richmond, north-west Queensland, Australia. He has worked with undergraduates and vocational trainees through various roles including Medical Educator; Senior Lecturer in General Practice and Rural Health; and Medical Co-ordinator of the North Queensland Rural Health Training Unit. He is currently Associate Professor of General Practice and Rural Medicine at the James Cook University School of Medicine and is involved in developing the general practice and rural components of the JCU curriculum. He undertakes clinical work at the Unihealth medical centre in Townsville, as well as the occasional rural locum. His interests include rural medicine, community-based education, and small group teaching.

