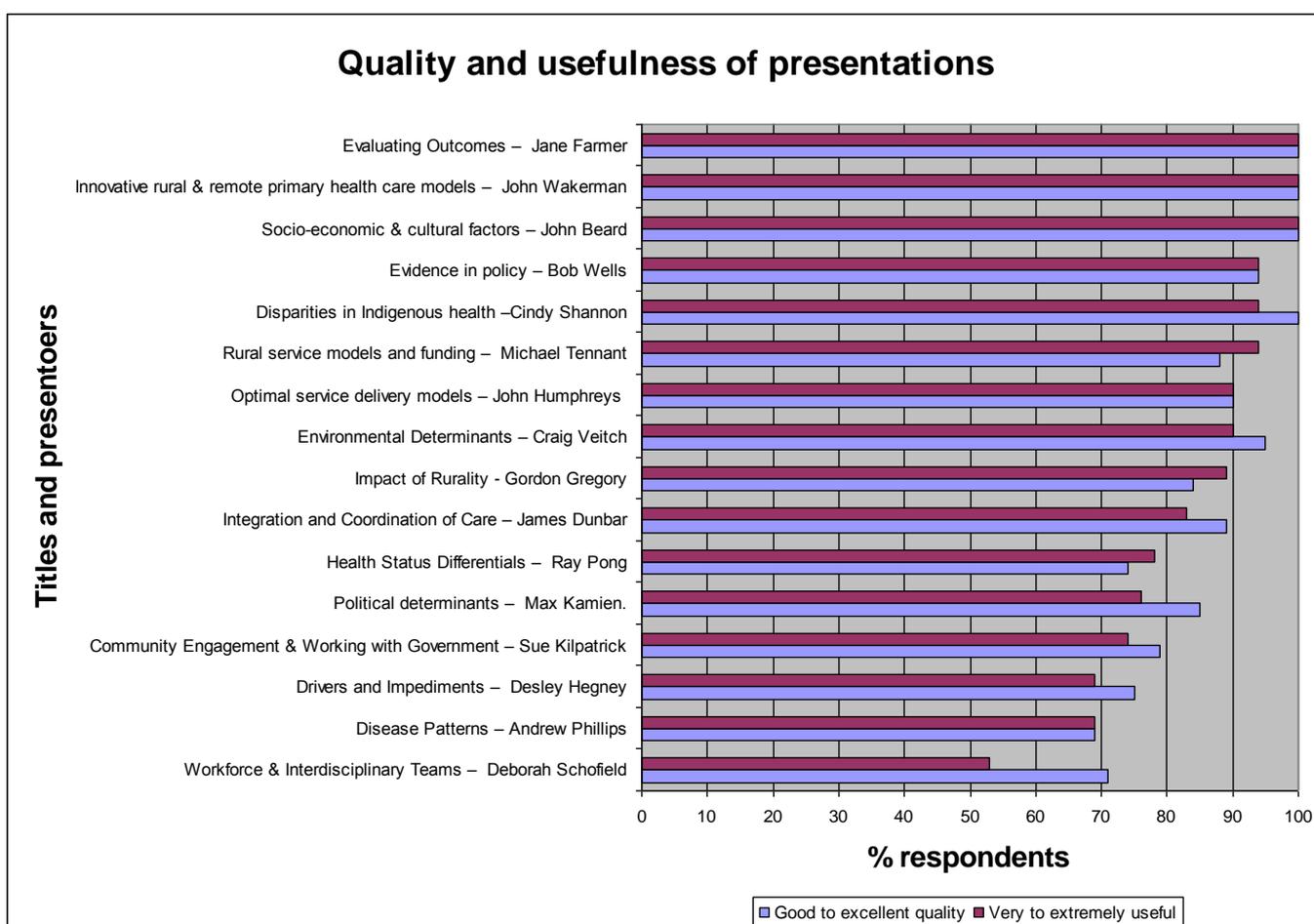


INAUGURAL RURAL & REMOTE HEALTH SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

A unique and valuable experience

Report of the evaluation of symposium (held July 6-8, 2008) and follow up survey (conducted December 2008)

This report incorporates both the evaluation of the Symposium and the follow up (5 months later) of any outcomes from the Symposium. Of the 66 delegates who attended, 22 responded to both surveys (response rate = 33%). Of those who responded, 60% were academics/researchers.



The Symposium has received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

INAUGURAL RURAL & REMOTE HEALTH SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

What delegates liked best about the symposium

- Pre-distribution of most papers – allowed better discussion, less time on presentation.
- I particularly liked being able to meet face to face with so many people I have either corresponded or read about.
- Great discussion about rural/remote health issues and current issues/challenges being faced by the health research community (eg rural/remote definition, characteristics, classification schemes, researcher development, working with policy/decision makers etc) and possible solutions for the way forward (eg community involvement, research 'think tanks' etc). Strong awareness of the delegates' link between rural health research and the Government policy agenda.
- The networking was the best part, including the Symposium dinner. Meeting high calibre local and international researchers.
- Gave me a fresh idea about rural research and where it should go.
- I really enjoyed the connection between researchers and policymakers. Networking in this way has great potential for future projects of relevance to improving health in rural and remote Australia.
- The key presentations provided excellent framework research on status and dimensions of rural health. The discussions created valuable place for looking at ways forward for rural health research in Australia and the links to policy development.
- It was a unique opportunity to assess the progress and development of R&RH research, and to benchmark this against international progress.

Suggestions for improvement for next Symposium

- The focus and purpose needs to be clearer.
- Need more policy people there as speakers and participants.
- I think the small groups were a good idea, but more innovative techniques for facilitating these could have been used to focus and maintain people's attention.
- Perhaps a way of capturing new ideas better.
- Further research and discussion of rural/remote research evidence and policy where a difference is made to service delivery: by particular programs (in practice) that are actually implemented on the ground to provide a benefit for the consumer. International comparisons about programs that have worked and why? Discussion on rural/remote health information. What information do we currently have? What are its limitations and gaps? How can this information be collected? If it already exists, who has this and how can it be best leveraged?
- The policy discussions presented suggested that there was no impact of researchers on policy and yet there was vast experience in the room regarding effective partnerships and high impact with local, state and federal decision makers. The Symposium lacked both vision for a new place for rural health research and a critical reflection on what we have achieved to date.
- My observation was that more work needs to take place to build effective working relationships between researchers and policy makers (as in public servants, not as in politicians). If the aim of the following Symposium is to get more research findings being utilised in policy making, then it would be useful to have more input from policymakers in the design and the presentations of the Symposium. Joint-presentations



The Symposium has received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

INAUGURAL RURAL & REMOTE HEALTH SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

by researchers and policy makers may be able to highlight case studies of effective working relationships and the key factors for success. Eg, more emphasis could be given on how to present research proposals and findings effectively to policy makers. Another suggestion is to unpack what the drivers are for Government when formulating (rural) health policies.

- Increased Indigenous health focus and participation, expert speakers on climate change issues, presenters from outside of the traditional health realm eg environmental scientists, more time for discussion in tables/groups, a lot of content was focussed on established issues and seemed repetitious. Are these a true reflection of the future of rural/remote health research?

Suggestions for future Symposia

- Academic Capacity building in rural areas.
- I would like more information from the major funding bodies on research priorities and implications for rural health research.
- Model excellence in research by demanding from ourselves work which holds up to academic scrutiny rather than characterising rural research as a special interest group. Get some arguments going – a healthy discipline is one where there is debate which inspires one to think carefully and critically.
- It may be useful to develop health and wellbeing indicators for rural communities, which are relevant, significant and specific for these communities, to measure these indicators over time and to analyse trends. Eg the Canadian Index of Wellbeing developed by the CIW Network in Canada utilised a holistic integrated approach to wellbeing and emphasised the need for sustainable interventions. It includes a cost analysis of interventions. (See <http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/download/bgdp-ve-ciw.pdf> and http://www.atkinsonfoundation.ca/ciw/SkinnedFolder_1191333926952). The Ministry of Social Development in NZ has published reports on health and wellbeing indicators for the general population (See <http://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/> and <http://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/>).
- Have a more specific research focus – rural/remote research is very broad and perhaps the focus can be narrowed eg epidemiology, disease determinants.
- Presentations on research that is undertaken in the next round of APHRI grants to identify models of best practice for knowledge transfer could be the basis for discussion about replication work that could be done in the future.
- I think we only vaguely touched on the role of rural and remote health research within the whole health improvement paradigm including primary health care. I think discussion on its purposes and limitations are worthwhile continuing.
- Adoption of existing research: what do we already know and how can we use it? The impact of climate change on rural communities, workforce, infrastructure. Appropriate service models maximising available workforce and managing contextual limitations.
- A plenary on the community level factors affecting rural health outcomes.
- The Symposium can (1) increase the number of early career researchers, as suggested, and have a focus in whole or part on nurturing the next generation before the old farts drop off their perches (2) have a focus on linkage and exchange and increase the number of decision-makers (not just government, also NGO's, professional groups).
- Clinical researchers and their place/role in rural and remote health.



The Symposium has received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

INAUGURAL RURAL & REMOTE HEALTH SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

Final comments about any aspect of the Symposium

- Probably the best of its kind I have been to on Rural issues.
- Excellent delegate participation.
- Timing was quite bad. The Population Health Congress was on in Brisbane at the same time (programs overlapped by 1.5 days).
- Overall, the conference was extremely worthwhile for me to attend and I would welcome invitations for similar events. I think NZ can learn a lot from Australia and hopefully we can have closer working relationships in the future.
- I believe it will engender a new wave of rural health research.
- The idea of building local research Talent was interesting and so a discussion paper on the development of research skill and projects at the local level would be valuable.
- Opportunities for mentoring and building connections between experienced and new were lost because the experience gravitated to each other and the overseas speakers – to the exclusion of new researchers.
- Fantastic meeting and terrific experience.

Summary of follow up survey – conducted December 2008

77% believed that rural and remote health researchers in Australia should give further consideration to the concept of a Rural Health Research Institute

95% believed it would be useful to hold another rural and remote health scientific symposium, probably in 2010 in a rural town like Alice Springs that was relatively accessible to all.

60% were willing to help with planning.

Specific uses to which you know the findings from the Symposium have been put.

- Useful in the development of an ARC Discovery grant
- AJRH Special Edition
- Development of a research program in RIRDC has found the info from the symposium of good use.
- Findings provided to the Rural Health Services and Policy Branch of the Department of Health and Ageing for consideration.
- I believe that some of the discussion was helpful in getting an impact factor rating for Rural and Remote Health Journal. This I believe is very important for our discipline and I was grateful to know that progress was being made toward this end.
- I have cited some of the papers in a paper I am preparing for publication.
I have passed on some of the papers to my phd students and project researchers.
- Informed a just completed research study with Queensland Health.



The Symposium has received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

INAUGURAL RURAL & REMOTE HEALTH SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

- Informing undergraduate programs and research initiatives.
- Ongoing research into our Sustainable Practice index and advocacy for rural workforce issues.
- Reference point for rural health policy developments within the State Department
- The communicate has informed the RIRDC Farm and Fishing Health and Safety Technical Committee's decisions on its priorities for research funding in the current grant round.
- They have contributed to the general knowledge base of rural research.
- Used Beard's model (social determinants of neighbourhoods) in my work. Contacted people I networked with at Symposium. Gained a greater understanding of rural health and the UDRH's from this Symposium.
- informed our thinking on some projects
- website, AJRH

Additional uses to which the findings should be put, eg. additional targets for the recommendations

- Would be useful in the future to relate to specific rural and remote state government agencies reform processes and strategic plans
- I suggest that there be a media campaign to accompany the forthcoming special edition of AJRH
- I think inequality as an issue will be a key issue for policy makers, as well as future delineation between rural issues and remote issues.
- Informing government policy
- There is a sort of 'so what' or "what's next" factor... perhaps research is better placed if it also looks at how it can be translated into something ... action?

Final comments

- I think this was a good initiative that could develop into something lasting and worthwhile.
- From a layman's perspective I thoroughly enjoyed the conference which taught me much about aspects I had never previously considered. It might be worth cultivating a few handpicked specialist writers to attend. This would help educate them to the often subtle nuances that exist in the health sector, in particular the rural, regional and remote health areas.
- I am a non-academic researcher working in policy role within a Rural Workforce Agency- I found the forum most useful and would be keen to attend again.
- I liked the format of the symposium. Small group break outs are good but I think it is most productive to spend a good amount of time discussing things as one large group - after a short break-out. This allows ideas and issues to be streamlined and presented in a more orderly fashion but enables the entire group to comment. I find the large group discussions very interesting.
- This should build on the infrastructure provided by the UDRHs and the RCSs (maybe). This provides a ready made resource and a symposium can allow them to show case their capacities and skills.



The Symposium has received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.