

Insights from the six month evaluation of UWA's Rural Clinical School.

Presenter Details

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Abstract

The Commonwealth of Australia initiated a strategy to improve rural health care by developing nine new Rural Clinical Schools. The University of Western Australia set up the Rural Clinical School in May 2002. The School was to take 21 students, in four rural areas: Kalgoorlie, Broome, Port Hedland and Geraldton. The curriculum, internal assessment and final examinations were to be the same as the city based students. Only the delivery was to be different with the delivery to be in rural Western Australia.

This paper discusses one aspect of the UWA RCS internal evaluation. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Students were asked what had worked, and not worked during the year, how they found various aspects of the curriculum and its delivery, some questions about their general living experience in their rural area and if they had any advice for future students.

The School became aware that students in one center, had less anxiety than the other three centers and that this impacted strongly on the number of hours they spent learning. During the interviews and subsequent qualitative analysis for themes, some reasons for this were identified: the impact of group dynamics; the need to structure the "unstructured" environment of rural learning; the number of learning tasks students focused on at any one time; whether students shared their learning on each topic with at least one other student; how well each site coordinator knew the curriculum and transmitted this information to other teachers at their site. Additional aspects included the Rural Clinical School needed to clarify which assessment processes were flexible and which were "fixed"; the medical school needed to clarify what curriculum content was essential, what was desirable and what was additional; issues of workload and burnout needed to be monitored and good work practices encouraged and supported including the opportunity to take up learning in a different environment as a break during the year.