



Editorial



Leigh Kinsman

'Knowledge translation', the linkage between research and the implementation of evidence-based findings into policies and practice, has become something of a fashionable term. The reality is that it represents an integral component of our research mission to improve the health of rural Australians. The number of grants and publications we boast will mean nothing to our rural constituency and funders if the current rural-urban health differential remains unaffected by our research activities and rural Australians remain disadvantaged in health care and health outcomes.

One study undertaken within the School of Rural Health exemplifies how research knowledge can be readily translated into practice, with resulting benefits for both patients and service providers¹. A major regional hospital emergency department sought solutions to its worsening waiting times and the department congestion that were contributing to significant community dissatisfaction and a reduction in government 'bonus' funding. Sizeable increases in clinical staff numbers had not been associated with improved patient flow.

In response to this problem, a collaboration of academics, clinicians and hospital department managers was formed, led by a research expert. The hospital provided access for the researchers to its emergency department database, and facilitated observations of patient processes within the emergency department. This research took place over a 3 year period, and the team met regularly to report on progress.

Research outcomes included the identification of predictable trends in patient presentations to the emergency department, the development of models able to forecast demand, and the identification of internal factors contributing to bottlenecks. This information was conveyed to key personnel via regular seminars and meetings.

Immediate practical outcomes were the alteration of rostering patterns to meet predictable demand and an improved understanding of models that facilitate improved patient flow. As a result of this project, waiting times have subsequently decreased in spite of large increases in emergency department presentations, and patients are spending less time on trolleys in the department. Recent research findings suggest too that this reduction in congestion improves patient outcomes, including mortality.

The collaboration described took several years to develop, but has clearly produced significant outcomes that directly contribute to the improved health care of a rural population. Such 'knowledge translation' outcomes provide professional satisfaction that goes far beyond the

recognition associated with publications and grants.

Genuine knowledge translation strategies need to be built into our routine work practices and should be accepted as an integral and important component of how we measure the success of our research.

1. Kinsman L, Champion R, Martin M, Masman K, May E, Scholes M and Zalstein S (2009) *Managing Emergency Department Demand*. Research Report, School of Rural Health.

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Senior Research Fellow

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Meet some of the research staff

Dr Shari Sieglhoff

Research Fellow



Shari commenced as a Research Fellow at Bendigo in December 2008. Shari has contributed to a number of rural health projects such as the investigation of the role of nurse practitioners in remote primary health care settings, models of service delivery for small rural and remote communities and the mental health needs of young people living in small rural communities. She is

now working on a project investigating indicators and benchmarks that can be used by primary health care services to determine the effectiveness of workforce retention initiatives in rural and remote communities.

In 2003, Shari completed a PhD about the lived experience of family caregivers caring for a relative suffering from a mental illness in rural communities. The study found, from the perspective of families, that the ongoing support and services needed to provide holistic care for their relatives are limited in rural environments. Shari continues to pursue future research investigating the perspective of people who suffer from a mental illness about the dominance of the medical model in treating mental illness.

Previously, Shari was a Lecturer at La Trobe University for over ten years. Shari lives in Bendigo with her 5 year old son.

Dr Deborah Russell

Research Fellow



Deb Russell commenced as a Research Fellow in Bendigo in December 2008. She has a background as a General Practitioner and is currently completing a Masters in Clinical Epidemiology through the University of Newcastle. Her study to date has included core subjects in epidemiology and biostatistics, clinical

epidemiology, nutritional epidemiology, qualitative methods and this year she is anticipating completing intermediate and advanced biostatistics subjects which will provide her with a strong quantitative skill base.

Deb is currently working on a project titled *Improving workforce retention in rural and remote primary health care services* which is designed to investigate the retention of primary health care workers in rural and remote Australia, to calculate the costs associated with high turnover and poor retention, and to examine the effectiveness of workforce retention measures.

Visitors to the School

ARC Discovery Project – Beyond the Workforce Crisis: Advancing conceptual understanding in rural and remote health

The first of a series of workshops was held in Bendigo during Easter for Chief Investigators of this ARC research project. Chief Investigators are: Lisa Bourke (University of Melbourne), Judy Taylor (University of South Australia), John Humphreys, and John Wakerman (Centre for Remote Health, Alice Springs). The aim of this project is to develop an innovative, theoretical framework for understanding rural health that can underpin more effective policy, education, research and practice. The team will develop a framework and then critically discuss it with 80 experts in rural health in order to provide a road map documenting the underlying features of rural health, its future directions and potential solutions. Only through understanding the causes of rural health inequities as well as the challenges and strengths within rural health, can meaningful change transpire.

The next Workshop will be held in Alice Springs in August 2009.



John Humphreys, Anne McKenzie, Judy Taylor, Lisa Bourke & John Wakerman

PhD Graduation Congratulations

Rebecca Jones

Rebecca Jones has successfully completed her PhD and graduated on 7 May 2009. The title of her thesis is *“From the Ground Up: An Environmental History of Australian Organic Farming and Gardening”*. The research looked at the links between health and environment in Australian organic farming and gardening.



Dr Rebecca Jones

Congratulations Rebecca!

Research Projects

'Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL) The Australian Longitudinal Survey of Doctors'



Professor Gordon Whyte

Professor Gordon Whyte, Head of the School of Rural Health, represented Monash University at the release of the initial results of the national 5-year longitudinal survey of doctors at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research in April.

Professor Whyte outlined the importance of comprehensive, longitudinal data as the basis for good workforce planning, and

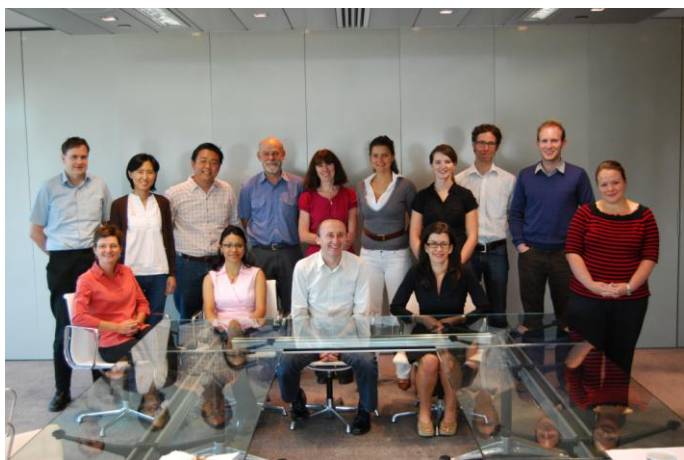
highlighted the value of strong collaborative research partnerships between leading researchers and institutions.

This NHMRC funded study examines the changing patterns of doctors' work over time as the basis for better understanding medical workforce supply. All doctors are being surveyed over an initial four-year period. More than 10,500 doctors responded to the first survey. Initial results suggest that despite increasing numbers of doctors being recruited into medical training programs, the current GP workforce shortage is likely to continue because about 2500 GPs plan to retire from work within the next five years. The study results will be used to inform medical workforce policy and planning.

MABEL is also providing a valuable research capacity building program for PhD and Post-Doctoral research.

Further information, contact:

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The MABEL research team

'Developing oral health teams in rural Victorian residential aged care facilities'

Oral health in rural areas, especially among older people, is currently a major health problem in Victoria. Australians are living to older ages and, thanks to improved health services, are maintaining their teeth. Hence aged care services are now seeing growing numbers of people who have kept many of their teeth. Oral conditions such as tooth decay, gum disease, ulcers and infections can cause pain; reduce a person's ability to eat, socialise and impact on their quality of life; and may raise the risk of complications with lung infections and diabetes. The maintenance of good oral health is essential for optimal general health.



Traditionally, aged care nursing and caring staff are trained to manage and clean dentures but not natural teeth. Following on from research that was conducted in



Dr Rachel Tham with a resident

2008 in aged care services, Dr Rachel Tham, a dentist and researcher, has been funded by the Windermere Foundation Mary Patten Special Grant to conduct a research project. This involves evaluating the

impact of providing intensive oral health training to aged care staff, who will form an 'oral health team'. Rachel is conducting free oral check-ups for all residents so that the aged care services can better understand the types of oral health issues their staff need to manage. The 'oral health team' will, in turn, provide ongoing oral health training and mentoring to other aged care staff.

Further information, contact: rachel.tham@med.monash.edu.au

Recent Grants

Department of Human Services – Workforce Innovation Grant

The School of Rural Health has been successful in being one of only seventeen grants awarded from the more than 350 applications for DHS funding. The project received \$82,500 and is entitled 'Rural allied health workforce retention in Victoria: Modelling the benefits of increased length of stay and reduced staff turnover'.

Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute

John Humphreys has been awarded a Stream Sixteen Research Grant for \$44,468. The project, 'A proposal to investigate what incentives and innovative measures are used internationally for attracting, supporting and retaining the workforce in rural and remote areas with particular focus on GPs, nurses and allied health providers', is a joint collaboration with John Wakerman from the Centre for Remote Health, Alice Springs and Dennis Pashen from the Mt Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health.

Research Projects

'Being involved in the country: productive ageing in different types of rural communities'



Dr Sam Davis

Productive ageing recognises the contribution of older people to economic, social and cultural growth and helps build a sustainable community. However, we know very little about the participation and contribution of people 50 years of age and older to rural communities. Dr Sam Davis and Karly Smith from the School of Rural Health, Monash University, Bendigo, in collaboration with Bendigo-Loddon Primary Care Partnership have received \$48,734 from the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre Research Program to find out more about the role of people 50 years of age and older in sustaining, strengthening and developing their communities in rural areas. Surveys were distributed through the Australia Post Unaddressed Delivery Service to 20 towns in Northern Victoria in order to collect information from people 50 years of age and over to help:

- Improve understanding about productive ageing in rural Australia;
- Identify the opportunities and constraints affecting the participation of rural people 50 years of age and older within their communities; and
- Provide insight into the best ways to support participation in different types of rural communities.

This study is examining key issues of productive ageing in the rural context, with analysis in relation to the different age cohorts (50-64, 64-79 and 80+) in different types of rural

communities, to address gaps in the research literature which in turn, will inform policy and planning. The outcomes will determine whether social and civic engagement differs across declining, stable and growing rural communities, identifying opportunities and constraints on social and civic engagement in these communities and provide insight into facilitating opportunities for social and civic engagement for both long time residents and those migrating into different types of rural communities. The study will be completed in July 2009.

Further information, contact:
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Recent Publications

C1 Refereed Articles

Bourke, L., **Humphreys, J.S.** & Lukaitis, F. (2009). Health behaviours of young, rural residents: a case study, *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 17(2), 86-91.

Chesters, J., Drysdale, M., Ellender, I., Faulkner, S., Turnbull, L., Kelly, H., Robinson, A. & Chambers, H. (2009). Footprints forwards blocked by a failure discourse: issues in providing advice about medicine and other health science careers to indigenous secondary school students, *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 18(1): 26-35.

Davis, S. (2009). Guiding design of dementia friendly environments in residential care settings: considering the living experiences, *Dementia*, 8(2): 185-203.

Humphreys, J.S. (2009). Key considerations in delivering appropriate and accessible health care for rural and remote populations: Discussant overview, *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 17(1): 34-38.

Reupert, A. & Maybery, D. (2009). Fathers' experience of parenting with a mental illness, *Families in Society*, 90(1): 61-68.

Tham, R.C.A., Cassell, E. & Calache, H. (2009). Traumatic orodental injuries and the development of an orodental injury surveillance system: a pilot study in Victoria, Australia, *Dental Traumatology*, 25(1): 103-109.

Tham, R., Erbas, B., Akram, M., Dennekamp, M. & Abramson, M.J. (2009). The impact of smoke on respiratory hospital outcomes during the 2002-2003 bushfire season, Victoria, Australia, *Respirology*, 14(1): 69-75.

K0 Research Reports

Kinsman, L., Champion, R., Martin, M., Masman, K., May, E., Scholes, M. & Zalstein, S. (2009). Managing Emergency Department Demand, *Report to Bendigo Health*, 1-74.

Kinsman, L., Endacott, R., Cooper, S., Scholes, J., Buykx, P. & McConnell-Henry, T. (2009). Situational awareness of patient deterioration in a simulated environment, *Report to Nurses Board of Victoria*, 1-52.

Postgraduate Activities

Postgraduate Student Profile

Durga Shrestha



Durga Shrestha is a PhD student at Monash University School of Rural Health in Bendigo, funded through an NHMRC and MIPRS Scholarship. The major focus of her PhD is the rural medical workforce with special interest on overseas-trained doctors. Durga's supervisors are Professor John Humphreys and Dr Catherine Joyce. Her PhD is part of a larger study on Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL). Broadly, MABEL is a national, longitudinal, cohort study that aims to determine factors affecting behaviours of doctors in Australia.

In 2001 Durga completed a Master in Medical Microbiology from the Tribhuvan University, Nepal and has since lectured in microbiology and worked as a microbiologist. She was one out of ten students who received an AusAID scholarship in 2005. Durga completed a Master of Public Health from the University of Melbourne in 2006, with special interest in International Health. Her passion to improve the lives of minority groups led to her work as a Programme & Communication Officer in the Asian People's Alliance for Combating HIV and AIDS (APACHA).

