Do Rural Student Clubs Produce More Rural Health Professionals?

Milford, Elissa, Fogarty, Sam, Moffatt, Jennifer, Baker, Peter

Rural Clinical School, School of Medicine, The University of Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia

Background: There is a well-documented shortage of trained medical practitioners in rural and remote areas, which places great importance on attracting medical students and junior doctors to a career in rural medicine.

This need has been recognised by the Commonwealth Government and a number of programmes have been developed to attract students to rural practice. The establishment of rural health student clubs at universities is one such initiative and they are the primary focus of the present study.

There has been significant Federal Government funding directed towards the development and continued support of the rural student health clubs across Australia. However, to date there has been no formal research undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of these rural student clubs in increasing rural career intent. This is an important question because the clubs are a key component of the Department of Health and Ageing's strategy to stimulate student interest in medical careers in rural areas.

The University of Queensland's (UQ) rural health club, TROHPIQ (Towards Rural and Outback Health Professionals In Queensland), is an example of a club founded by the provision of funding through the Department of Health and Ageing.

This study aimed to investigate the influence that TROHPIQ has on increasing health students' interest in a rural career. In addition to evaluating the clubs' overall influence, this study also aimed to examine the quality and the influence of each individual event and activity that TROHPIQ runs. The study also explored students' attitudes towards a rural career.

Method: A 21-question survey was developed and all UQ medical students currently studying at the domestic clinical school locations, regardless of their TROHPIQ membership status, were invited to complete the survey. The hard-copy surveys were distributed to students through the relevant clinical school coordinators, and returned to the UQ Rural Clinical School for collation.

The collected data will be analysed with SPSS software. The analysis will focus on the main questions of interest to this project:

1) The extent to which TROHPIQ has stimulated respondents' motivation for a rural career
2) The effectiveness of the different elements of the TROHPIQ programme
3) Motivations for choosing a rural career
**Results:** By mid-2011, data from the all four years of medical students will be available.

**Conclusion:** As the first study of its kind, it is hoped that this study will provide information on the role of rural health clubs in promoting interest in rural careers among medical students. As an additional objective the study will help TROHPIQ and other rural health clubs shape their future direction by showing where their limited resources are best directed. It is anticipated that this study will also inform policy development by contributing valuable research data on student rural health clubs.