

New Zealand Rural General Practice Network (The Network) – Student Mentoring Programme

The Network is looking at the opportunity of establishing a student mentoring programme. The programme will be between the Network's practice members and our undergraduate students who have shown an interest in rural general practice. Our plan is to start with rural medical and nursing students and based on the success of the programme, will grow to include pharmacy, physio and dentistry students in the future.

Our programme will be predominantly distance-based mentoring, however it may include face to face meetings too. We are in the final scoping stage and our current approach is:

- Driven by the students and flexible to suit both mentor and student
- Targeting 6th year medical students, 3rd year nursing students, nurses undergoing further study (and rolling this out to pharmacy, dentistry and physio students)
- Encouraging Registrars to mentor students
- Keep the 5th year immersion students enthusiasm up once they have completed their 5th year and becoming mentors to students going into 5th year
- Creating an on-line information portal with both members and students having access

A high percentage of students who study in a rural setting end up in rural careers and we understand that the rural immersion programme run by both the Auckland and Otago universities in conjunction with DHBs have proven to be successful. We are therefore also finding out what existing student support and mentoring is provided so that we do not replicate work already being done.

In a recent article in the Sunday Star Times 5 July 2015, Business Editor, Jayne Atherton says, "Mentoring is an elusive term, but at its best it means the sharing of social capital". Jayne quotes a GP friend of hers "It is a common frustration that just at the time when doctors have acquired a lifetime of experience in diagnosis, they then retire."

Testimonials:

- NP student in the Bay of Plenty being mentored by a rural GP based in the BoP and a rural NP based in South Canterbury
Here are my own thoughts on the invaluable mentors that come from the rural health sector. Despite them being invaluable they are not rewarded when compared to the reward they get from having under graduate students. Nor are they rewarded by having funding in primary care for NP roles. This influences how I work in the role a RN completing a NP prescribing practicum within my workplace. Without these people I will not get to the end of my path. They are core to the end result of my work as NP student. The mentors I have are a harmonious pair. The essence of the holistic model are captured in what they do for me as a NP student. With a very wise doctor focussing on the addition of the biomedical model to the psycho-socio-cultural model that is more familiar to me as a nurse his work is cut out. The sharing of his network introduced me to another amazing person. A rural nurse practitioner who has helped me to understand the application of my work to the competency framework the NZ nursing council assesses against. Again, her work is cut out too.

What I have found invaluable is the relationships I have with these mentors. Despite isolation which is a familiar issue to rural practitioner I have been able to have important discussions. First by email, then face to face at national conference, then more emails. My first impressions of my mentors where that they were going to support me all the way. And that is exactly what they are doing. The right people in my opinion are those that have walked where I am going.

- Nurse Practitioner in South Canterbury
Rural nurses struggle with the tyranny of distance and time and a lack of available and willing mentors but on the positive side they appear to be willing to use technology to gain the support they need. Ironically it is the rural communities that would benefit most from well-educated registered nurse workforce with some prescribing activity, within the general practice team. It is also the rural and remote that experience the most challenge with access to broadband, travel and support services from a well-staffed general practice team.
- A GP from the Bay of Plenty
*The key to this is student leadership. In terms of mentorship I am sure we can identify rural GPs who are keen to offer support, ideally linking students back into the community they came from would make a lot of sense to me.
The mentor will need some training and support - basically they need to know the rural training pathways and how to access them, and how to access information for the student if they ask questions that are difficult.*
- A Nurse Practitioner in South Canterbury has mentored a number of nurse practitioner candidates over the past 2 years:
I believe mentoring is so important for nurses throughout the workforce from undergraduate through to NP, as there are large gaps in the support structures for these nurses particularly in rural setting and also in primary health care generally. Hence my commitment to students, I am passionate about this and we have made it a goal at our medical centre that we will always have students from all stages...

Your feedback will be appreciated so that we can finalise and implement this important service.

For more information please contact Ronelle Bolton, ronelle@rgpn.org.nz or by phone on 04 495 5874