

Title: Extending the health workforce: Recruitment and retention of health professionals in primary health care.

Author: Fraser, J.

Background: Globally, the primary health care professional workforce is in short supply especially in rural areas. Demand for health services is likely to increase in future decades due to an ageing population, increased patient expectations and better access to technology.

Objective: This paper explores present and future recruitment and retention strategies of health professionals into primary health care with a particular emphasis on rural areas.

Discussion: The rural career pipeline is a term defined from medicine which can be applied to all health professionals. It refers to a systems based vertically integrated approach to recruitment and retention of health professionals. The career pipeline is a complex system with many inputs and outputs and long lead time to produce new clinicians. Recruitment and retention are different complementary processes in this system. Recognition that students from a rural background are 2.5 times more likely to pursue a rural health career has led to many programs to promote recruitment and retention of the primary health care workforce. This paper suggests that in the 21st century that these programs will need to be much more targeted with programs developed to suit segments of the health professional workforce population. The role of the generalist will need to be supported in this system. Strategic systems based research using qualitative methods to explore career decision making is useful to assist this process. Qualitative research from Australia and Pakistan involving different generations will be presented to argue that for many health professionals career is balanced with life style considerations. The role of identity, place and gender are important constructs in this process.