

Practical learning: achieving excellence in the human services

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Findings of research on peer supervision in rural and remote australia using technology

Keywords: peer supervision; rural; technology; social work

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Abstract:

The value of supervision is such that regular professional supervision is required by the Australian Association of Social Workers for social workers to maintain Accredited Status. Whilst many workplaces provide supervision, in some organizations and particularly in rural and remote locations, social workers may have difficulty accessing professional supervision due to the isolated positions they hold. Two recent Australian state Health Department studies looking at recruitment and retention of professionals in remote areas (Cuss, 2005) and (Symons, 2005) both cite the lack of professional supervision and opportunities for professional development as the main contributing factors to high staff turnover.

This paper reports on the findings of a research project that is a qualitative, action research study looking at the experience of social work peer supervision in small groups using technology (phone and video links).

Social work volunteers in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia participated in peer supervision groups once a month for 12 months from Jul 2006 - Jul 2007 and evaluated their experiences with monthly evaluations (on-line) and focus groups at the conclusion of the trial. Each participant was interviewed prior to commencing the groups and at the conclusion of the trial period.

Peer supervision in virtual teams refers to a team or group whose members work together to explore and reflect their own and each others professional experiences by supporting, analysing, planning and hypothetically testing the changes in their professional and/or personal life of each other through telecommunication, while they are separated by geographical distance.v

This research contributes to applied knowledge regarding professional supervision. There is a significant gap in the literature on the topics of peer supervision and using technology. It could be applicable in other countries for social workers and allied health professionals wanting to enhance professional practice and the retention of staff.

Contribution:

This paper provides research in an area that currently has a gap in the literature - peer supervision and the use of technology (together). It may be of interest as many professionals in rural or remote locations have difficulty accessing appropriate professional supervision and professional development which is known to contribute to high staff turnover and burnout. The main intended audience is practitioners - social workers and other allied health professionals.

Date: Thursday 24 January 2008, 4.00-4.30

Venue: Carrick Three

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