

physical functioning; older rural women may also experience difficulties accessing appropriate health and social support. Older rural women could therefore be more vulnerable to psychological distress.

Methods: Participants were drawn from the 1921–1926 birth cohort of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health (n=12 432) who were aged 70–75 when recruited in 1996. The main variables used were: psychological distress as measured by the Mental Health Index (MHI) of the SF-36 scoring less than 52; area of residence classified as major cities, inner regional, outer regional and remote/very remote; sociodemographics; physical functioning; and social support. General estimating equation models were used to estimate the independent effects of each of the variables on the proportion with MH <52 over the course of the study (15 years).

Results: After adjustment for other factors older women residing in inner regional, outer regional, and remote/very remote areas were found to have significantly better mental health compared to women in major cities as measured by MHI <52 (ORs 0.90[0.82–0.99], 0.85[0.77–0.99], 0.66[0.46–0.95]).

Conclusions: Older women living outside major cities have significantly better mental health. This advantage is greater in the remote/very remote areas. They may be a more resilient group.

Enhancing computer literacy and information retrieval skills: a rural and remote nursing and midwifery workforce study

Jane Mills¹, Marg McLeod², Karen Francis³, Mohammad Al-Motlaq Shutnawi⁴

¹James Cook University, ²Australian Catholic University, ³Charles Sturt University, ⁴Hashemite University Zarqa-Jordan

Nurses and midwives, collectively, represent the largest workforce category in rural and remote areas of Australia. Maintaining currency of practice and attaining annual licensure with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Authority (AHPRA) present challenges for individual nurses and midwives and for their health service managers. Engagement with information and communication technology, in order for geographically isolated clinicians to access ongoing education and training, is considered a useful strategy to address such challenges.

This paper presents a pre- and post-test study design, which examines the impact of an online continuing professional development (CPD) program on rural nurses and midwives. The aims of the program were to increase basic skill acquisition in the utilisation of common computer software, the use of the Internet, and the enhancement of email communication.

Findings from the study demonstrate that participants who complete a relevant CPD program gain confidence in the use of information and communication technology. Further, increased confidence leads to increased access to contemporary, reliable and important health care information on the Internet, in addition to clinicians adopting email as a regular method of communication.

Health care employers commonly assume employees are skilled users of information and communication technology. However, findings from this study contradict such assumptions. It is argued in the recommendations that health care employees should be given regular access to CPD programs designed to introduce them to information and communication technology. Developing knowledge and skills in this area has the potential to improve staff productivity, raise health care standards and improve patient outcomes.

The National Arts and Health Policy Project

Deborah Mills¹

¹Arts and Health Foundation

On 11 November 2011 an arts in health paper, developed with the assistance of the Arts and Health Foundation (AHF) and calling for the development of a national arts in health policy, was passed through the Australian Government’s Standing Council on Health. This decision was supported at the meeting of arts and cultural ministers in March 2012.

These decisions were a response to the AHF’s campaign for a national policy for arts and health driven by the desire to enable improvements in the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities through a more cohesive approach to knowledge sharing and sector development for contemporary research and practice in arts and health.

Australia’s first arts and health policy will have been developed by March 2013, so the 12th National Rural Health Conference will provide a timely opportunity to review the policy and provide an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses against: