

Training and support of sessional staff: a needs analysis of training requirements at James Cook University

Gillian Knott¹, Linda Crane², Ian Heslop¹, Beverley D Glass¹

¹Pharmacy, College of Medicine and Dentistry, James Cook University, Townsville, Australia

²Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine, Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia

Sessional staff have increasingly been involved in teaching at universities, playing a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theory and practice, particularly for students in the health professions. However, the training and support of these staff, referred to in pharmacy as tutors, has often been neglected.

METHODS: To inform the design of the training program, a needs analysis study was conducted involving a pharmacist tutor questionnaire to all past, present and potential pharmacist tutors at JCU. This was followed by a series of focus groups involving pharmacist tutors, academic staff and students. Evaluation of this data used both qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative methods to investigate the role of the tutor, experiences with or as tutors, the benefits of training and training requirements.

RESULTS: Tutor feedback indicated that there was a need for training and that a pharmacy-specific training program had significant benefits over a generic university-wide program. The most important role for pharmacist tutors was identified as the linking of theory to the practice which is thought to assist in maintaining currency of the Pharmacy curriculum and in the development of professionalism. In order to adequately undertake and fulfil this role, tutors identified several important areas of training, included teaching communication skills, providing student feedback and appropriate assessment and marking.

DISCUSSION: This study has provided a valuable insight into the training and support requirements of pharmacist tutors at JCU and created a sound base from which to design an appropriate pharmacy-specific tutor training program.