

224 | Through the farm gate: pharmacy students intention in persuing a rural career

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Introduction: Rural clinical placements offered in Australian Schools of Pharmacy provide a strong exposure to rural experience to students, and are often their first exposure to rural life. This study investigated pharmacy students' intention to work in a rural environment after graduation from their undergraduate degree, and student perception of the benefits of rural clinical placements. Facilitators and barriers to work in rural areas were also investigated.

Method: A survey of pharmacy students was conducted at the peak national pharmacy students' body (NAPSA) congress in Hobart, Tasmania. The survey consisted of seven main questions relating to rural pharmacy clinical placements and their intentions to work rurally after graduation. A mixed-methods approach investigated intentions to practice rurally. Quantitative measurements were made using a likert scale. Qualitative data was extracted from written responses and thematically analysed.

Results: A total of 71 out of 308 pharmacy students registered as attending the congress participated in the survey. Over 50% of students indicated an intention to work in rural or regional areas. Similarly, when students were asked about the intention to undertake an internship in rural areas showed that only 5.6% of students suggested they would be unlikely to consider working in rural areas. Analysis of students' intentions who undertook rural placements revealed that 78.6% of survey students indicated their willingness to work in a rural area after their rural placement. There were several barriers to the students' desire to take up rural positions; the strongest barriers were social isolation and lack of family support. Moreover, 75% of students who worked rurally were intending to return to their home location.

Conclusion: This study shows that rural placements can affect student perception and attitudes towards a rural life. These results can be utilised by industry education representatives to target rural training opportunities and enhance the understanding of pharmacy students' drivers to rurality.
