Enabling successful transition to rural dental practice through curriculum design and practices

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Aims and Background

Aim:
To outline how aligning curriculum design and clinical experiences enables and encourages transition to graduate careers in rural, remote and regional areas.

Background:
• Established 2008 - one of only three dental schools in Australia located outside a capital city; only Dental School in Northern Australia
• Broad-based ‘comprehensive’ program that includes all aspects of general dental practice
• Focuses on issues of concern to populations in Northern Australia
  – particularly relating to tropical, rural, remote and Indigenous practice
  – workforce maldistribution and shortages
Methods

Iterative process – annual review of data gathered from student surveys

1. Student feedback on subjects (SFS)
2. BDS Exit Survey - career intentions and graduate destinations
3. Tracking graduate careers of first three ‘pioneering’ cohorts
Transitioning from:
Adapting to:

Drover

(Photo Courtesy of Drs Heitkonig & de Souza, CWHHS)
Transitioning from:
Adapting to:

(Photo Courtesy of Dr Anna McBean, Central Australia)
Enabling rural transition

• Early exposure to ‘hands on’ learning experiences
  – simulation, schools, community settings & JCU dental clinic.
• Strong foundation in sciences with application to regional profile and general practice
  – (e.g. complex patients with co-morbidities; RhD; oral cancer)
• Embedded rural, remote and Indigenous health focus in epidemiology, health promotion, preventive dentistry, cultural safety, research opportunities …
• Competency hurdles – prosthodontics, restorative, surgery, dental & medical emergencies, radiography, therapeutics …
• Begin treating patients from Year 3; extensive clinical hours
• Final capstone year with 40 weeks clinical experience
Rural ECOH project
Lift the Lip: Train the Trainer
Capstone year

• Extensive clinical experience (2200 – 2400 hours)
• Long regional, rural / remote clinical rotations that produce clinically competent ‘work ready’ graduates
  – who can adapt to challenging environments
  – who are reflective practitioners
  – with a sense of professionalism, ethical and social responsibility,
  – who are sensitive to the needs of the wider community.
Y5 Subjects surveys

As a result of this (final Year 5) subject, I feel confident that I can be an effective professional. (57% AGREE / 43% STRONGLY AGREE)

![Bar chart showing 57% agreement and 43% strong agreement.]

This (final Year 5) subject helped develop my ability to plan and deliver professional services. (64% AGREE / 36% STRONGLY AGREE)

![Bar chart showing 64% agreement and 36% strong agreement.]

CROKER AYRI 2016
Exit Survey: How well did the 5 year BDS course prepare you for being a dentist?

Ability to Apply Knowledge

- Not at all
- A little
- Okay
- Well
- Very well
Exit Survey: How well did the 5 year BDS course prepare you for being a dentist?

Clinical Skills

- Not at all
- A little
- Okay
- Well
- Very well
Exit Survey: How well did the 5 year BDS course prepare you for being a dentist?

Work Readiness – 1st Week

- Not at all
- A little
- Okay
- Well
- Very well
Most valuable aspects – 1st
Most valuable aspects – 2nd
Outreach - Transferable skills
Outreach – transferable skills
Results

- Student feedback on clinical experiences shared with clinical partners each rotation.
- Student feedback and annual review has informed changes to how the rural and remote focus is embedded into curriculum across the pre-clinical and clinical years of the BDS.
- The establishment of a final capstone year is effectively enabling alignment of the Australian Dental Council’s *Professional attributes and competencies of the newly graduated dentist* with the distinctive profile of a rural dental practitioner.
Day 1, Weipa, 2016

- 1st Canadian dental student to ‘go remote’
“Loving life in Meredin”
Conclusion / Recommendations

• Ongoing student feedback will inform program design and delivery to optimise engagement with learning opportunities and clinical experiences.

• Further research is required to evaluate whether the current curriculum design can continue to reliably enable transition to the rural workforce given the emerging funding challenges.

• Evaluation is required to assess the impact of reduced clinical support funding on rural and remote clinical placements.