In response to the identified problem, the Clinical Skills Unit (CSU) team was formally established in 2007 to strengthen CS within the existing curriculum, with the explicit aim of producing more ‘work ready’ graduates. An integrated educational approach to address this identified problem resulted in implementation of the following interventions in the medical curriculum between 2007 and 2013:

- Increase in the number of clinical skills workshops delivered in years 1-3 (Figure 1);
- Introduction of activities supporting integration between theory and practice in the early years of the course, aiming to create knowledge through transformation of experience;
- Introduction of elements supporting authenticity and professionalism to CS workshops (such as Volunteer Simulated Patients, mandatory attendance, reinforcement of the importance of documentation; and mandatory wearing of professional attire);
- Introduction of Hurdles (clinical assessment activities where the student must demonstrate proficiency in a particular clinical skill task or technique before progressing); and
- Increased focus on promoting student confidence levels by giving students the opportunity to: interact with simulated patients; repeatedly practice communication skills; and receive detailed feedback. This was done with the aim of promoting student perceptions of self-competency and proficiency.

The implemented changes in CS training at JCU over the last seven years have provided learning experiences that prepare students with all the essential skills for real-world practice in rural and remote Australia. A significant impact on student learning was achieved by providing an authentic and safe learning environment to practice technical and communication skills, resulting in a high proportion of ‘work ready’ graduates for rural, remote and tropical practice.

Results

The comprehensive, integrated approach to CS teaching established at JCU since 2007 lead to several positive outcomes. In particular, feedback from graduating students from the 2013 cohort provided evidence that the CSU had been successful with achieving more confident and work ready graduates, with 80% of students reporting they were either ‘well’ or ‘very well’ prepared in their work readiness. In 2013, no student reported feeling inadequately prepared in regards to their clinical skills for the first week of upcoming internship, in contrast to 13% of students feeling inadequately prepared in 2006 (Figure 2).

Discussion

The implemented changes in CS training at JCU over the last seven years have provided learning experiences that prepare students with all the essential skills for real-world practice in rural and remote Australia. A significant impact on student learning was achieved by providing an authentic and safe learning environment to practice technical and communication skills, resulting in a high proportion of ‘work ready’ graduates for rural, remote and tropical practice.

References