

Short-stay placements the future for remote area dental services

June 3 2014, by David Stacey



One of the keys to solving extreme shortages of dental practitioners in remote Australia is proving to be short-stay (three to four weeks) placements for final-year dental students, according to a recent report into a 10-year program in WA.

The paper published in The Australian Dental Journal examined evidence gathered from a program which has integrated research, service and visiting education dental services in some of Australia's most remote communities for the past decade.

According to the authors from the International Research Collaborative - Oral Health and Equity at The University of Western Australia's

Department of Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology, the successes of the last decade include developing new solutions to reduce the dental pain and suffering for people living in remote Australia. Their models of dental services, based on developing strong community links and tied to the supervised student participation, have been found to be both cost-effective and sustainable.

Despite an increasing demand for dental care across Australia most dentists are expected to remain in the city. As trends in medicine have shown, the greatest effect will be felt in rural and remote regions, where an undersupply of dentists already exists.

The increased focus on Indigenous and rural and remote health from the very first year of dental education right through to placements in the final years has introduced new graduate dentists to [remote areas](#) where dental care was previously all but non-existent.

Previous research suggests an increased likelihood for health graduates to choose rural practice if they have a rural background, or are exposed to rural practice during their education.

Team leader and co-author UWA Winthrop Professor Marc Tennant said the model provided a launch pad for more dentists to consider remote area [dental care](#) as a viable career opportunity.

"It is clear that it is important to provide strategies that will increase the recruitment and retention of practitioners in rural and remote areas," Professor Tennant said.

He observed that close professional mentorship and arrangements that saw dentists and students linked to the local community health service were vital to the model's success, which is now being used as the basis for developing new dental schools in Australia.

"A true highlight of the program was to provide local people with skills in disease prevention and work-skills that have contributed to new opportunities for a number of Aboriginal people across remote areas of the country," Professor Tennant said.

The team is now working to share its experiences in other States and internationally and as far afield as Vanuatu and Saudi Arabia.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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