Pharmacy students’ rural career intentions

Kirschbaum, M1, Khalil, H.2 Page, A3

1. Mark Kirschbaum MPharmSc, University of Tasmania, Centre for Rural Health, Tasmania 7250. mark.kirschbaum@utas.edu.au

2. Hanan Khalil PhD, Monash University, School of Rural Health, University Department of Rural and Indigenous Health, Victoria, Australia

3. Amy Page MClinPharm, University of Western Australia, School of Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care, Western Australian Centre of Rural Health, Western Australia, Australia

Objective
To describe the effect of rural placements and rural background on pharmacy students’ intention to practice rurally.

Design
This cross-sectional study invited 250 pharmacy students to participate in the survey.

Setting
The National Australian Pharmacy Student Association (NAPSA) annual congress held in Bendigo, Victoria in January 2014.

Participants
Pharmacy students at the NAPSA annual congress.

Results
A total of 156 participants responded to the survey. Participants were mostly female (68%), and all were aged under 30 with the majority aged 20 – 24 (116, 74%). A third of the respondents were (33%) identified with having a rural background, and about half (53%) had undertaken a rural placement.

Students who came from a rural background were more likely to intend to work in rural areas after graduation (p>0.001). However, there was no difference in rural intention if the student had a rural background and had completed a rural placement compared with urban background students. Additionally, the majority of students (93%) considered rural placements as beneficial to their training. Metropolitan placements were of longer durations than rural placements. Standards of healthcare and social isolation features are major barriers to rural practice and facilitators included increased patient interaction and community engagement.

Conclusion
This study shows that a rural exposure (either a rural background or rural placement) can positively affect students’ intentions to participate in the rural workforce regardless of their background. Students have a desire to understand rural health and are likely to consider a rural career. However recruiting graduates to rural positions will remain difficult as perceived barriers to rural work have remained constant.

Key words: Pharmacy, Career, Rural, Pharmacy students