



NORTHERN RIVERS
University Department of Rural Health

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NRUDRH news

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Prime Minister opens newest edition to NRUDRH student accommodation

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, came to the North Coast on 13 April 2010 and made significant funding announcements for Cancer Care Services across the Northern Rivers area. While in Lismore, he opened the latest edition to Student Accommodation for the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health (NRUDRH). The four bedroom facility adds to the educational precinct being established opposite the Lismore Base Hospital (LBH) which is



increasingly important not only to students but practitioners and health services in the region.

In 2009 the NRUDRH supported over 2500 weeks of clinical placement for Health Practitioner Students undertaking a rural placement. In addition over 5000 hours of professional education were provided through our facilities.

Often these stretched quite widely through videoconference links to other smaller centres.

New pathway to study medicine, dentistry and pharmacy

A new agreement has been established to set aside postgraduate places at the University of Sydney for achieving Southern Cross University graduates who are Indigenous or of rural origin. Up to 10 places in medicine, up to four places in dentistry and up to five places in pharmacy will be set aside annually for Southern Cross University graduates who meet the entry requirements. Applicants will need to meet specific academic criteria and be of 'rural origin'. Being of rural origin is defined as having lived in a rural area for at least five years (consecutive or cumulative) from the commencement of primary school.

The agreement means Indigenous students and those of rural origin studying health and human sciences degrees at Southern Cross University, may qualify to follow a pathway to becoming a doctor, dentist, or pharmacist – by undertaking their postgraduate studies at the University of Sydney.

Southern Cross University Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Lee and University of Sydney Vice Chancellor Dr Michael Spence signed the agreement in front of a gathering of dignitaries at a special ceremony held at the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health (a joint venture of the two universities), in Lismore last month.

The two universities have agreed to cooperate in the provision of these specialised rural pathways, to enable rural and Aboriginal youth to begin their studies at Southern Cross University and then enter courses offered through the faculties of dentistry, medicine and pharmacy at the University of Sydney.

The agreement reflects a shared goal to increase the proportion of rural school leavers who enter health professional practice in rural areas.

Aboriginal and rural students from the region who might otherwise not have considered undertaking preparation to become doctors, dentists or pharmacists, are now able to transfer to the University of Sydney after successfully completing their undergraduate degree.

They will be mentored through their undergraduate studies by Southern Cross University staff and by the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health, to make them strong candidates for the highly competitive University of Sydney courses of study.

The agreement reflects goals to improve two specific cohorts of health workers entering practice in rural areas - those who are Indigenous, and those who grew up in rural areas and therefore might choose to return to their home towns to practise.



Snakes in a theatre!

A couple of students walked into a packed lecture theatre on March 31st only to find that they were surrounded by some of this planet's deadliest and most high-profile reptiles, albeit ones safely stowed in glass tanks in which they either slithered and danced, or quietly curled up. Needless to say, the students' reactions provided a healthy dollop of comedy to an already informative and entertaining Wednesday afternoon at the NRUDRH.

Filled virtually to capacity, the Liz Rummery Theatre played host to two very knowledgeable and well-spoken authorities on venomous bites and the world of reptiles. Renowned clinical toxicologist Professor Alison Jones, guest lecturer from the University of Western Sydney, kicked the session off with a practical and interactive lecture on snake and spider bites, their various manifestations, clinical symptoms and time courses, and the appropriate management of such emergencies, with particular emphasis on the benefits of immobilisation and bandaging. Building upon such standard first aid practice, Prof. Jones explored a range of scenarios and was kind enough to curtail some silly therapeutic myths as well as provide handy pointers for staving off the progression of venom through a victim's body whilst further medical intervention is sought. This in particular whetted the appetites of the more Emergency Medicine-minded who engaged the UWS Dean of Medicine in some scholarly repartee. A very practical discussion on the use of antivenin, touching on the useful phenomenon of anti-venom cross-effectiveness, rounded out Prof. Jones' half of the session, leaving the audience a great deal more knowledgeable about an otherwise rather



specialised branch of clinical practice. Allan Burnett, manager of Reptile Awareness Displays of Australia (RADOA), then took to the floor and wasted no time introducing two carpet pythons into the audience, with mixed reactions around the house. What followed was a thoroughly engaging presentation on native Australian snakes, all venomous to varying degrees, ranging from the world's

deadliest land snake, the Inland Taipan or Fierce snake, to the more familiar but equally deadly Eastern Brown snake, the Tiger snake, and the endearingly miniature death adder which nonetheless ranks a respectable eighth.

Mr Burnett spoke with articulate enthusiasm and brought to the theatre an infectious fascination for the scaled slitherers, even in those with obvious ophidiophobia, or even a mild dislike of crawling things. He also proved an apt handler of the lethal creatures, some of which have the individual capacity to kill scores of human beings, and on numerous occasions raised collective gasps and left hearts in throats. Apart from displaying superior handling skills however, Allan displayed a broad knowledge of reptilian behaviour/psychology and offered some pointers on how to safely manage a chance encounter. Following the formal end of the session there was the opportunity for a quick chat with Allan, additional playtime with the pythons, and the chance to cradle two lovably docile lizards. All in all, this was an immensely successful, educational and enjoyable presentation which surely left all who attended a little nostalgic of primary school days and a lot more informed with regards to the management of bites and potentially fatal envenomation.



Contributed by Tope Ogundare, University of Sydney 3rd year medical student

A CBT ONLINE TRAINING FIRST FOR NRUDRH

The NRUDRH in association with the Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health (MICRRH) is offering online training in cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) for the first time in Australia over the coming months. A/Prof. James Bennett-Levy of NRUDRH and Prof. Russell Hawkins of MICRRH have been funded by the Department of Health and Ageing to evaluate the successful UK program, PRAXIS CBT ONLINE. The question is: Is this a useful way to train health professionals in rural/remote Australia in CBT? What kind of additional support do they need to make online training as effective as possible?

The online CBT roll-out will take place between July and November this year, with project completion date 16th February 2011. For further information, contact Online Project Manager Helen Perry at helen.perry@sydney.edu.au.

Grafton Base Hospital holds Expo for staff and students



Jane Nichols, student coordinator at the NRUDRH Grafton Campus, recently 'flew the flag' to promote what the team there does with student co-ordination and the contributions the NRUDRH makes to Grafton in general.

Grafton skills lab

The skills laboratory at Grafton has been expanded with the purchase of additional anatomical models and cupboards to house equipment and trolleys. A fully equipped 'Emergency Trolley with Defibrillator' and an 'Automatic External Defibrillator' allows for basic and advanced life support training.



As well as weekly sessions in the skills laboratory conducted by our Clinical Nurse Educators, Clinicians also run many scenario-based sessions. These scenarios include both adult and paediatric trauma and emergency cases. Instructional and practice sessions involving full physical assessment, airway management, cannulation and catheterisation are also regularly conducted for both students and staff. Sessions are often arranged for individual groups of students, for example:- the long-term University of Wollongong students recently had a skills day conducted by our emergency



department Clinical Nurse Educator to practice many skills prior to their final examinations. Feedback from all those using the skills laboratory has been extremely positive.



Research clinician update

The NRUDRH is committed to improving Indigenous health and building research and evaluation skills in Indigenous health workers and researchers.

In 2009, NRUDRH appointed Darlene Rotumah to an Aboriginal-identified Researcher Development Program position. As a counsellor in an Aboriginal health service, Darlene was interested in learning about research to take back to her local Indigenous community, and to enhance her clinical practice.

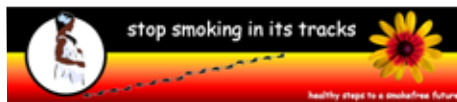
Darlene worked as a research assistant on the NRUDRH's (non-Indigenous) Pharmacist Academic Lindy Swain's project, Strategies to Increase Home Medicines Review in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. She also received training in research methods and supervision, mentoring and support from NRUDRH Indigenous Academics, Associate Professor Janelle Stirling and Dr Shawn Wilson.

Darlene assisted with ethics applications, a literature review, data collection and background information for the research sites, 11 Indigenous communities around Australia. This included information on the traditional owners, the history of each Aboriginal health service and other key Aboriginal organisations in the area.

"The RDP training has really enhanced my clinical practice," Darlene reflected. "I can now find, read, understand and talk with colleagues about research publications. Time in academia also helped me to reflect on my work. And from the research project, I now have more knowledge of medication issues and I can recommend the Home Medications Review service to community members," she said.

Lindy Swain reported that Darlene made valuable and insightful contributions to her project and that she learnt a great deal about Aboriginal culture and communication from Darlene. "Through the focus groups Aboriginal patients have expressed their desire to learn more about their medicines and any potential side effects," Lindy said. "The majority have embraced the concept

of reviews as they would help improve medication concordance and empower them to ask questions."



"Stop Smoking in its Tracks" project takes off!

"Stop Smoking in its Tracks" commenced in Ballina in May, and will be ready to go in Dubbo in August. The program is a comprehensive approach to helping pregnant Aboriginal women quit smoking. The program will be run by the Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Services in Ballina and Dubbo, and will be trialled for a 15-month period. If successful it will then be implemented in the control sites at Macksville and Taree.

"Stop Smoking in its Tracks" is a comprehensive, evidence-based program that builds on previous research conducted by the team at NRUDRH, in collaboration with the AIMHS team in Ballina, and others in NCAHS. Over the past three years the team have conducted several developmental studies including in-depth interviews with local Aboriginal women, and surveys of antenatal care providers and pregnant Aboriginal women across NSW. The information from this research has been incorporated into the design to address the issues and barriers that women face when they try to quit. The program includes counselling for women, provision of specially designed resources, free NRT for women and their households, rewards for confirmed quitting, household resources, and quitting support groups, with support continuing for 6 months post-partum.

The research team, led by Dr Megan Passey, includes Jenny Gale, a community researcher, and Associate Professor Janelle Stirling. They have been joined by Cathy Malla, a PHCRED research clinician, for this year. Throughout their work, they have been

PHC RED clinicians

Cathy Malla has taken up a one-year position with NRUDRH as part of the Research Development Program (RDP). In this role, she is working with Megan Passey, Jenny Gale and Janelle Stirling on the "Stop Smoking in its Tracks" project, around reducing smoking in pregnancy rates for Aboriginal women in rural areas of NSW. Cathy's role in the project so far has been assisting with the development of support groups for pregnant women and training for the Aboriginal Maternal & Infant Health Strategy (AIMHS) teams who will carry out the program. Once the program is up and running, she will be involved in the collation and analysis of data that comes through from the project areas through the AIMHS teams that are rolling out the program. Cathy has a background in health promotion and has recently spent 4 years working for an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation in Fitzroy Crossing, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.



Project team members Jen Gale and Cathy Malla pictured with some of the resources they have designed.

supported by a community reference group who have enthusiastically provided advice and encouragement. The project is funded by the Indigenous Tobacco Control Initiative of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Shawn Wilson is an Indigenous person from northern Manitoba in Canada. Since obtaining his PhD he has been busy caring for his three children, which has put his career as both clinician and researcher on hold. So even though he has a PhD, he considers himself as an early career researcher although he hasn't had much opportunity to work in the field since completing his doctorate. With his appointment this year in the Research Development Program position he is reconnecting his clinical background in mental health with his doctoral research in Indigenous social sciences.

Shawn will be working as a member of a team of researchers to develop an

Indigenous wellbeing model and therapy strategy. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has perhaps the best evidence base as a successful model of providing primary mental health care services for people with anxiety or depressive disorders. However, there is a lack of evidence for its effectiveness with Aboriginal clients. For this action research project they plan to modify CBT for use with Aboriginal clients and then evaluate its effectiveness.



Scholarship award

This week Liz was surprised and delighted to be successful in applying for the Ian O'Rourke Scholarship PhD Scholarship in Patient Safety. The scholarship is named in honour of the late Dr Ian O'Rourke AO, Chief Executive Officer of the Institute for Clinical Excellence. Dr O'Rourke was passionate about the work he undertook with Aboriginal communities, at the Redfern Medical Centre, in far north Queensland, and in the Northern Territory where he worked for five years. The Ian O'Rourke Scholarship is awarded by the Clinical Excellence Commission every three years in New South Wales.

Liz was awarded this scholarship to support her PhD full-time over the next three years. Her project is predominantly a qualitative study of: 'The experience and perceptions of Aboriginal people with end stage kidney failure who are receiving haemodialysis treatment in regional NSW'. A major aim of this study will be to identify issues of communication and miscommunication between Aboriginal haemodialysis patients and renal health care professionals and discover how these issues impact on health outcomes. Liz is currently working clinically as a renal nurse with the North Coast Area Health Service and will remain in that role one day per week throughout the project.

Enrolled through the School of Public Health, Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney and based at the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health (NRUDRH) in Lismore, Liz has a supervisory team headed by the Director of the NRUDRH, Professor Lesley Barclay, along with Dr Allison Tong, a Research Fellow at the Centre for Kidney Research at Westmead Children's Hospital, and Janelle Stirling, Associate Professor of Aboriginal Health at the NRUDRH.

Liz and the NRUDRH are very thankful to the Clinical Excellence Commission for supporting this important research aimed at improving quality of life and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are forced to undergo haemodialysis to sustain life.

free NRUDRH research seminars Series - Jul-Nov 2010

Wednesday afternoon seminars (4th Wednesday, 3.45 - 4.45pm)

WHERE:
NRUDRH
61 Uralba Street, Lismore.
Presentations are video-conferenced free to Broken Hill, Grafton, Casino, Coffs Harbour, Murwillumbah, Port Macquarie & Tweed Heads.

This seminar series is supported by the NRUDRH PHCRED program, which is funded by the Commonwealth Government Department of Health and Ageing.

Date	Topic	Presenter
28th July	Recognising and responding to workplace bullying: Findings from a study of Australian nurses	Dr Marie Hutchinson, Lecturer, Southern Cross University
25th August	Blending the lines in the Allied Health workforce: Credentialed Therapy Assistants and inter-professional practice	Sheila Keane, Senior Lecturer, NRUDRH
22nd September	Exploring the nutritional and environmental risk factors in Coeliac Disease: Results of a NSW survey	Joanna Harnett, PhD candidate, Southern Cross University
27th October	Families' experiences of adolescents and young people living with cancer	Jan Barling, PhD candidate, Southern Cross University
24th November	Supporting mums to quit: Factors contributing to high smoking rates among pregnant Aboriginal women	Dr Megan Passey, Senior Lecturer, NRUDRH

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PhD student seminar

"We had our first PhD student seminar on the 13th of May 2010. It is a measure of our maturity as a Department when we can have such a successful day and provide this sort of support for our students. Seven PhD Scholars presented on a variety of topics and methods ranging from allied health workforce, health indicators, systematic reviews to home medicines reviews in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. It was an opportunity to demonstrate the high-quality research conducted within our Department by our PhD Scholars. A total of 24 people attended the seminar throughout the day. Our next seminar is scheduled for 16th of November 2010. Please put this date in your diary!"



Contributed by Sabrina Pit, NHMRC research fellow

A first for the North Coast: CareerLink Pharmacy Project

2010 will see the first group of Aboriginal school students studying and working in our local pharmacies as part of a new training program which has been initiated by the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health, North Coast Region NSW Department of Education, Connect and the North Coast Institute of TAFE. The 16 students, from 11 North Coast high schools, who have been employed by local pharmacies will complete a Certificate II in Community Pharmacy, through North Coast Institute of TAFE, while also studying for their Higher School Certificate. This program is not only providing an exciting employment opportunity for the students, it will help the pharmacies to develop improved relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

A grant from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has funded a part-time Aboriginal Project Officer to provide additional support to the girls, their families, the schools and the pharmacies to ensure the smooth implementation and ongoing success of this project.

This project is being supported by many local pharmacies on the North Coast, the project team would like to thank the pharmacies for their support in this new and exciting project.

 **Southern Cross UNIVERSITY**



A joint venture of the University of Sydney and Southern Cross University supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and the North Coast Area Health Service