

Medical education: its role in addressing health inequities in north Queensland.

Rebecca Evans, Sarah Larkins, Tarun Sen Gupta, Louise Young, Richard Murray

Since its establishment, the School of Medicine and Dentistry (SMD) at James Cook University (JCU) has sought to facilitate the development of a high quality medical workforce equipped and inclined to practise in underserved areas. As a foundation school of the Towards Health Equity Network (THEnet), the socially accountable mandate of the medical school has been recognised and the school seeks to continue engaging with external stakeholders to achieve health equity outcomes for underserved populations. With even greater numbers of medical students in the university system there is now a unique opportunity to redress longstanding workforce shortages in north Queensland. However, to maximise this opportunity, we must ensure that there is vertical integration of training (including between prevocational and vocational), increased training volume and appropriate breadth of specialist training options in the region.

This paper will discuss undergraduate and postgraduate activities aimed at increasing the workforce in north Queensland, including:

- A review of strategies employed by JCU SMD to encourage growth of a medical workforce which is responsive to the health needs of regional populations including: (a) selection processes which favour rural-origin and Indigenous students; (b) curricular emphasis on rural, remote, Indigenous and tropical health; and (c) lengthy, frequent exposure to practise in rural and remote areas.
- A brief overview of the latest JCU graduate outcomes.
- Development of the Northern Clinical Training Network (NCTN). The NCTN is a collaborative that spans sectors (university, public and private health services) and geographic regions across north Queensland. Priorities for the NCTN include supporting high quality medical training in the northern region and developing strong vertical integration throughout undergraduate, prevocational and specialist training.

These training-based activities across the continuum demonstrate the commitment of various sectors in north Queensland to redressing workforce inadequacies and health inequities in the region.

[Conference abstract for Medical Council Conference 2011: Bridging the Gap. Auckland, New Zealand. 6-9 November 2011.]