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Comparison of assessment performance of rural and regional students in a unique Australian graduate-entry medical program

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Comparison of assessment performance of rural and regional students in a unique Australian graduate-entry medical program

Abstract

The Graduate School of Medicine at the University of Wollongong is one of Australia's newest medical schools, with a regional/rural focus and a distributed campus, and students are all expected to spend a significant proportion of their training in a rural setting. Due to the diverse learning environments that students are exposed to, we sought to determine by phase if there was any difference in examination results between groups who were located in rural settings and those in regional settings.

Keywords

medical, entry, graduate, australian, unique, program, students, comparison, regional, rural, performance, assessment

Disciplines

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Background: The Graduate School of Medicine at the University of Wollongong is one of Australia's newest medical schools, with a regional/rural focus and a distributed campus, and students are all expected to spend a significant proportion of their training in a rural setting. Due to the diverse learning environments that students are exposed to, we sought to determine by phase if there was any difference in examination results between groups who were located in rural settings and those in regional settings.

Methodology: We compared the end-of-phase examination results of regional versus rural-based students in each of the three assessable phases (Phases 1, 2 and 3) of the course, to determine if there were any differences between these groups academically. This includes a longitudinal integrated clerkship across 10 geographical hubs for all students in Phase 3.

Results: There are no statistically significant differences in assessment outcomes between any of the groups of students undertaking clinical placements in rural settings as compared to those in a regional setting.

Conclusions: Students spending more time on clinical placement in a rural setting are not at an academic disadvantage when compared to those who spend less time in these settings. In other medical schools where students volunteer for rural placements, rural experience has been shown to produce academic advantage, but this was not evident in our program, where volunteering was not an option. With only two graduating cohorts thus far, data is limited and further work is needed to get greater clarity around this as more cohorts of students pass through the system.