

Health status and risk factors in rural Australia

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancers and diabetes account for around 80 per cent of the burden of disease and injury and around 70 per cent of total healthcare expenditure in Australia. These chronic diseases are largely preventable, with risk factors contributing to over 30 per cent of Australia's total burden of disease and injury. Tobacco is the largest contributor (7.8 per cent of total burden), followed by high blood pressure (7.6 per cent), overweight and obesity (7.5 per cent), physical inactivity (6.6 per cent) and high blood cholesterol (6.2 per cent).

Australians living in rural and remote areas have poorer health status and face greater health risk factors. Additionally, about 70 per cent of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in rural and remote areas and they have significantly poorer health, with a mortality rate that is 3.2 times higher than for non-Indigenous people living in our major cities.

Overall, rural populations have an estimated 26.5 per cent greater burden of chronic disease than populations in major cities, with the leading causes being ischaemic heart disease, diabetes, and anxiety and depression. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the leading causes of disease burden are cardiovascular disease, mental disorders, respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer.

Because people living in rural, regional and remote Australia have higher levels of chronic disease and lower access to health services, and are exposed to higher levels of health risk than people who live in major cities, they have much to gain from an increased emphasis on health promotion and illness prevention.



Statistics from the National Health Survey (2007-08) also show that rural residents experience higher levels of lifestyle-related risk factors as compared to people living in major cities. Specifically, rural residents were:

- **1.24 times more likely to be daily smokers;**
- **1.09 times more likely to be physically inactive;**
- **1.32 times more likely to participate in risky alcohol consumption (for males);**
- **1.15 times more likely to be overweight and obese; and**
- **1.30 times more likely to report high blood pressure.**

RURAL MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIPS—CLASS OF 2011

This year in Bendigo has been such a full on, eye opening time that has lead to incredible experiences and many new friends.

The year started off with a move from Melbourne, my surrogate home for the previous three years, to sunny Bendigo. I was a little apprehensive about moving back into "Halls of Residence" style accommodation, but in the first weeks our group there became fast friends, and I can't imagine spending this year anywhere else. I really appreciated the group that I was placed with especially as I took last year off to travel and work, and did not know anyone from this year level when I first moved down, but they all welcomed me and we have all worked really well together.

This year was our first year in the Hospital, and I think that a big part of this year's steep learning curve was to do with figuring out how a hospital works! From finding out where the doctor teams seem to hide on ward round to learning which staircases not to get lost on, I think that this year that we got a real feel for what we will actually be doing once we graduate as Doctors.

Our rotations have been broken up into Surgical (first half of the year) and Medical (second half). While on my surgical rotation, I was amazed at the awesome (and I use awesome in the true sense of the word!) procedures that I witnessed. Some of the surgeries I observed ranged from the implantation of a new hip to the emergency resection of ischemic bowel.

Being a third year medical student has meant that we are now able to carry out minor procedures such as taking blood, inserting catheters and moulding plasters on broken limbs. Getting to do practical things in the hospital has been a real highlight.

Being in Bendigo this year has given me a higher appreciation of the country life style. Growing up in Alexandra, a small town of about 2,000 people, I couldn't wait to get to the big city lights of Melbourne, but I have really appreciated coming back to the fresh air and beautiful area of Bendigo that I live in now. There is a real sense of community that I hadn't realised was missing.

This second semester I have been on the medical ward, which has given me more time to interact with patients, and I have had several eye opening encounters talking to people and hearing about their story, not just medically, but also about their life experiences. I have really enjoyed becoming more comfortable and confident talking to patients and I'm constantly surprised with how willing people are to share with us for the benefit of our learning.

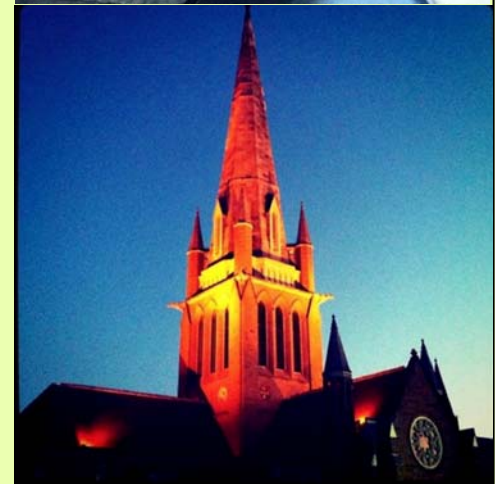
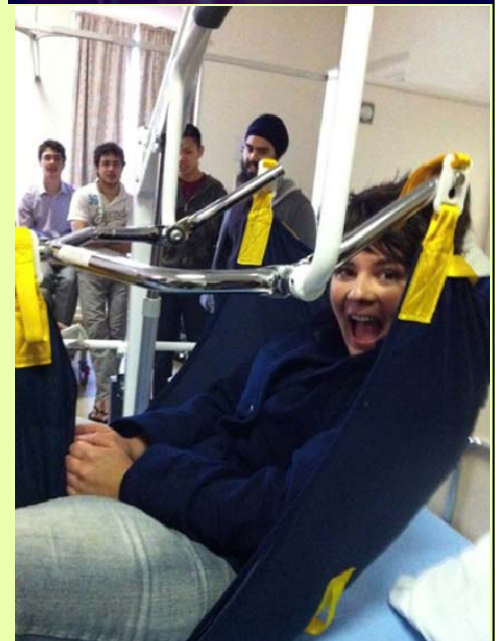
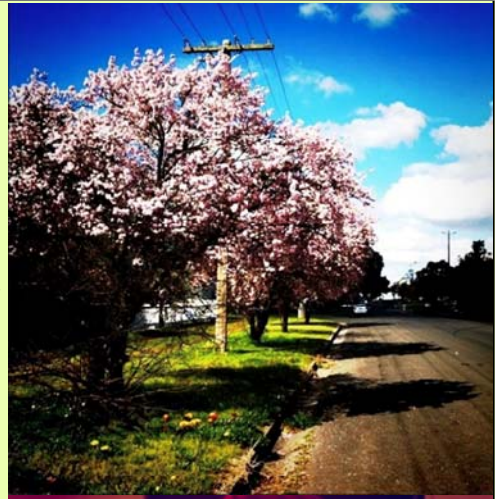
To the right are a few snap shots into my Bendigo year:

1. Cherry blossoms on a back street in Bendigo
2. A workshop on lifting machines
3. Plaster Cast practice
4. The view from my window

A big thank you to Rotary to for supporting me this year and look forward to keeping up with what Rotary are up to in the future.

Kimberley Jungalwalla

**Monash University (Bendigo) Sponsored by
Rotary Club of Bentleigh Moorabbin Central**



Kathryn Knight

Charles Sturt University

Rural Placement—*Lithgow Hospital*

Post Grad Year January 2011—*Dubbo Hospital*

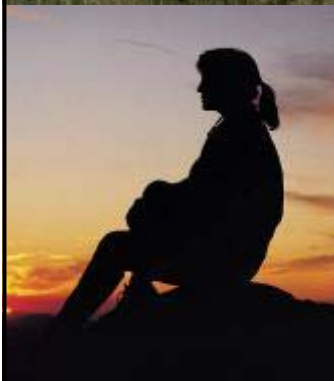
"I am now almost half way through my first year as a registered nurse. I am currently working in a rural paediatric unit which I love. Paediatric nursing was always something that I was interested in however I never thought that I would want to pursue a career based primarily on it. Working in the unit has made me reconsider my thinking.

Being in a rural unit has enabled me to have a wide and varied experience, as unlike in larger metropolitan hospitals rural units take all patients and are not divided into certain levels of care or diagnosis. I have taken care of general and post op patients and witnessed paediatric resuscitation. Working in a paediatric unit during winter has meant that the ward has been incredibly busy. This can be fairly daunting some days when you have increased patient loads but it also meant that I have learnt about a variety of cares for different diagnoses including broken bones, bronchiolitis, gastro etc. I have also improved my knowledge of isolated and barrier nursing technique.

Another new experience was commencing night shifts; previously I had only done 1-2 night shifts as a student. Nights have been challenging and have both positive and negative aspects. I enjoy the team nursing and greater level of communication that occurs on nights, as often the two nurses will share the entire ward and not have specified patients however the physical demands and fatigue have been challenging. Around five in the morning the fatigue sets in however when you finish the shift and walk out into the daylight you feel as if you could keep going, therefore I have found it important to be disciplined in sleeping when I go home.

I have also had the opportunity to engage in a short paediatric resuscitation course which I am currently in the process of completing. I believe this is invaluable and has extended my knowledge greatly on resuscitation process and procedure.

Originally I was to finish my new graduate year on a general ward however I have requested to stay and graciously the paediatric unit has allowed me to finish my new graduate course there.



Tammy Seckold

Central Queensland University

Rural Placement—*Innisfail District Hospital*

Post Grad Year January 2011—*Cairns Base Hospital*

"These last few months have proven to be a busy period of my life with a distinct focus on looking to the future, reflecting on the past and living in a very time poor present!

However, much time I have spent planning for the future it seems the past has been far more demanding for attention! Issues surrounding the cyclone and its impact on our lives never seemed far away but another event was coming... graduation time! The ceremony was held in Nambour a short distance from the Noosa hub of Central Queensland University from where I undertook my distance nursing studies. This was a particularly special moment for me and my family being the first person in living memory from both of my parent's sides to have graduated from university. Standing on stage in my robe and fancy hat in front of my fellow students, lecturers, family and strangers I felt an overwhelming pride in what I had achieved as well as spurring something inside of me to carry on my studies in the future.

Recently I have begun undertaking further study through Queensland health online services CDES. This offers a number of courses which depending on the particular path chosen may lead to providing credit towards university certificates in various nursing specialties. The only problem is which path to venture down!! At the moment I have just finished tackling the broad compulsory studies involved before progressing to either emergency nursing or renal nursing as well as exploring the specialist courses regarding working and integrating into a rural nursing facility.

The past few months have been an absolute whirlwind, however, it seems I can always count on my fellow staff members in the medical imaging department at Cairns base hospital where I am spending my graduate year. While the staff seems split into long term Cairns locals and more transient workers all have proven to be very helpful in this period of learning for me as a graduate nurse. I have been so very fortunate that any question or queries that I have seems to find a positive and supportive teacher and have had the pleasure of being appointed not only a very knowledgeable but kind and encouraging mentor.

I have found working in this section of the hospital very rewarding and interesting with no two days ever the same! I have been gaining experience not only in acting as a scout nurse and assisting doctors with procedures but also in tending to patients needs from all areas of the hospital. I have been involved with interesting diagnostic case where enthusiastic radiographers and radiologists have been all too happy to explain both the diagnostic and pathologic processes.

New challenges seem to wait around every corner for me and I look forward to tackling them with renewed determination with the confidence to take every situation and extract all that I can from it!"



Margaret Buchanan

Queensland University of Technology

Final Placement Innisfail Hospital

Post Grad Year February 2011 –

Mudgee Hospital

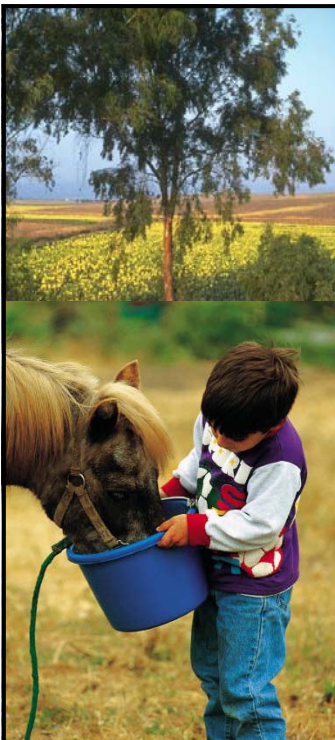
"It is difficult to believe that yet another three months has passed. It is even more difficult to believe that my graduate year has reached the half-way mark. I am continuing to enjoy my time at Mudgee Hospital and my confidence as a RN is growing with every shift.

The staff at Mudgee Hospital has continued to be very supportive in my learning and development. I am still working on Tilecote Ward; a 28 bed ward which caters for paediatric, geriatric, palliative patients and everything in between. As to be expected, the ward has been very busy during winter, regularly operating at capacity. I will feel relieved when we welcome spring – hopefully the nurse-patient ratios will improve.

I was fortunate to attend the 'Transition to Practice' study days at Dubbo Base Hospital last week. I was unable to attend these sessions at the beginning of the year as I had not yet been assigned an employee number. The sessions were very worthwhile and included; medication administration, electronic medical records, team nursing, operations of the Western Health Network Flow Unit and the Privacy Act.

I also attended two study days in Dubbo in early June which were equally valuable. These sessions included; deteriorating patients, total parenteral nutrition, wound care, central and peripheral venous catheters, ECG interpretation, diabetes, heparin infusions, renal assessment, speech pathology, role of the nurse in a rapid response and respiratory assessment. Throughout the study days, I enjoyed meeting graduate nurses from other hospitals in the Western Health Network. It is reassuring to share experiences with fellow graduate nurses and interesting to hear their experiences in remote, rural and regional NSW hospitals.

My husband and I are continuing to enjoy living in Mudgee and are now starting to feel part of the community. We are wrapping up our rugby and hockey seasons and are looking forward to experiencing the Mudgee Wine Festival in September. I am thoroughly enjoying my graduate year in Mudgee and am looking forward to many more years of rural nursing in the future."



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**If your Rotary Club would like to sponsor a
Rural Doctor or Rural Nurse**

it will cost

Rural Doctor Scholarships

are \$5,500 per year

The aim of the Scholarships is to provide incentives for medical students to complete at least one year in a rural area. This will encourage and influence the medical students to consider pursuing a medical career in rural Australia upon graduation or following postgraduate medical studies. This Scholarship would have the benefit of enjoying the fellowship of Rotarians and also expose the candidate to aspects of rural community life.

Rural Nursing Scholarships

are \$13,750

Post Grad Year in Rural Placement

The aim of the Scholarships is to provide incentives for nursing students to complete their 3rd year major clinical placement and graduating year in a rural/remote area.

This will encourage and influence the nursing students to consider pursuing a nursing career in rural/remote Australia upon graduation. This Scholar would have the benefit of enjoying the fellowship of Rotarians and also expose the candidate to aspects of rural community life.

