



^ Students on placement at Yalgoo, WA.

## Rural pharmacy

BY AMY PAGE

**'I never knew they did that,' is often heard from our allied health students and our pharmacy students about each other's role in the healthcare team.**

### Inter professional clinical placements for students

The Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health's (CUCRH's) inter professional service learning model of clinical placements is growing with students from universities in four states expected to participate this year. Pharmacy students work with nursing and allied health students, including social work, speech pathology, occupation therapy, and physiotherapy. CUCRH has a service learning approach where teaching and learning happens in collaboration with community partners. The CUCRH model delivers a balance of learner outcomes and community benefit in identified areas of need.

The University of Western Australia's CUCRH is the only one of Australia's 11 University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) in Western Australia.

It was established to introduce health education and research in rural Australia. The UDRHs each have a pharmacist funded through the Rural Pharmacy Liaison Officer Program of the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement (5CPA).

The liaison officers, who make up the Rural Pharmacy Support Network, supervise students on clinical placements at such geographically diverse rural locations as Geraldton WA, Alice Springs NT, Mt Isa QLD, Broken Hill, Lismore and Taree in NSW, Warnambool, Bendigo and Moe in Victoria, and Launceston, Tasmania.

Inter-professional learning may mean different things to different people. At CUCRH, it is interpreted to mean that students from two or more health professions work together in planning and implementing therapy or interventions for the one patient.

Patient-centred therapeutic goals are indistinguishable between disciplines, as all disciplines work together to achieve patient outcomes.

Students participate in one or more CUCRH programs depending on the time they spend at CUCRH, which is up to 14 weeks. Our interprofessional service-learning student programs include remote placements (Go Rural), community and residential aged care (CRAC), and student-learning clinics in our education simulation centre. Each week, all students participate in an interprofessional tutorial, and the student-run weekly planning meeting where they discuss their case load.

### Go rural

Allied health and nursing students may be placed at a remote town 500 km inland from Geraldton to be immersed in the unique health needs of a remote community. Pharmacy students spend several days in the town, and undertake cultural education with the CUCRH's Aboriginal academic, who guides them through his program *Understanding Yamatji: a cultural introduction to the local Aboriginal people*, and cultural communication skills. The pharmacy students see alternative avenues of pharmaceutical supply into remote areas. Many students have stated that this is a highlight of their placement.

### Community and Residential Aged Care

The CRAC program is a service-learning program at local aged care facilities. Pharmacy, speech pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and social work students have delivered additional services to older adults at our partner facilities. The students choose topics to work on, and work inter professionally and in discipline-specific areas.

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What sort of activities do pharmacy students undertake when working inter professionally in aged care?

One group of pharmacy students worked on a drug usage evaluation in collaboration with the local pharmacist contracted to the facilities for supply and quality use of medicines. The initial stages were done with discipline specific supervision and the drug usage evaluation package for hypnotic medications developed by NPS. The students set their thresholds for appropriate and inappropriate use of hypnotic medications, and gathered facility wide usage data.

The usage data demonstrated high levels of inappropriate hypnotic medication use, which was presented as de-identified data to CUCRH staff and other students, and at the aged care facilities. Following this, the students needed to develop an intervention

with students from other professions. Although the allied health students did not immediately understand the concern, during the workshop they came to understand the pharmacy students' concerns.

The social work and speech pathology students saw how the increased drowsiness or decreased cognitive function would impact on therapeutic interventions they were undertaking. The physiotherapy student noted this, and saw the implications for the intervention she was undertaking to reduce falls in the facility. Together, the students saw opportunities to improve drug usage for improved health outcomes in many ways that they could not have done working alone.

Pharmacy students have commented that after the placement they appreciate the detailed picture of an individual client as a person.

**"...AFTER THE PLACEMENT THEY APPRECIATE THE DETAILED PICTURE OF AN INDIVIDUAL CLIENT AS A PERSON."**

Students are challenged to apply their pharmacy knowledge, and improve their clinical knowledge. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the students gain improved communication skills with a diverse population, including older adults and Aboriginal people. Further, they stated that they better understand each other's role in the healthcare team, and the impact each can have on a patient's health.



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