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Academic development in generalist clinical settings: Developing, maintaining, enhancing & evaluating education and research

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Introduction/background:
Gippsland Regional Clinical School is one of four within the School of Rural Health at Monash. Clinical training is provided to around 40 full time students, most of whom are present in the local area for at least an entire academic year. Training sites include regional and district hospitals, specialist clinics, general practices and community and inpatient psychiatric facilities.

Compared to the generally larger and (usually) metropolitan-based, tertiary centres, our clinical learning environments have a health workforce that predominantly consists of practitioners with a broad range of expertise (be they doctors, nurses or allied health professionals). While many severely ill patients are treated in these settings, generally the illness-severity of the patients being managed is lower than those of patients being cared for in settings usually considered as “tertiary” care facilities.

This paper will briefly present examples of how:
• the delivery of a centrally (i.e. metropolitan) determined MBBS curriculum has been modified to be appropriate to a regional setting
• innovative methods of improving curriculum delivery may be developed in such settings
• an educational research activity is developing around this program delivery

Using these examples, a theoretical concept that incorporates the development, maintenance and enhancement of academic activity in these contexts will then be presented for discussion and further development.

Purpose/objectives:
To examine the implications for practice, scholarship and research of using generalist clinical settings for academic activity by:
a) presenting for discussion, and further development, a concept of academic activity in such settings.
b) as an aid to discussion, presenting examples of such developments from our local experience.

Issues for exploration/ideas for discussion:
1. What are the effects upon/implications for the academic environment of the differences between tertiary/more specialised settings and generalist clinical settings?
2. A discussion about the factors within the generalist context which will affect development of the academic environment, including:
   • local geography and demography
   • limited numbers of academic staff and their range of expertise

(continued)
• clinicians who are used to only focusing on patient-oriented care
• clinicians who have had limited opportunity to develop both education and research skills
• the spectrum of illness
• length of student attachment

3. A consideration of the opportunities provided by the generalist clinical setting, including:
• conduct of research and education programs in a context that reflects the nature of local health care delivery
• the potential for innovation in both education and research
• enhanced opportunities for Inter Professional Education
• new opportunities for university-health service partnership and cooperation
• development of a culture of “clinical inquiry” among clinicians (and students)