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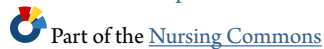
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A case study of factors influencing remote university nursing graduates and their decision to work in a remote hospital

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

This study was set in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia (WA) and explores the factors that influenced the decision of nurse graduates from Notre Dame Broome Campus to work in hospitals in the Kimberley. This introductory chapter provides the foundation for the study and details the arrangement of future chapters.

### **Overview of the problem under investigation**

Population growth within regional and remote areas of Australia and an ageing workforce are factors that continue to have an increasing demand on the employment of nurses. Challenges in recruiting and retaining nurses into regional and remote areas are not specific to Australia (Humphreys, Wakerman, Pashen & Buykx, 2009; Kenny & Duckett, 2003; Neill & Taylor, 2002). Within the next ten to fifteen years, however, the shortage of nurses in these non urban areas could reach a crisis point (National Health Workforce Taskforce, 2009; Health Workforce Australia [HWA], 2012). Factors that are intrinsic to this problem include the poor health status of Australian Indigenous people, an increasing ageing population and as a corollary an ageing nursing workforce (Hegney, McCarthy, Rogers-Clark & Gorman, 2002; Lenthall et al., 2011; National Health Workforce Taskforce, 2009; Preston, 2009).

Nurse shortages in regional and remote areas are a global phenomenon with a crisis predicted in the next 25 years. Recruitment of nurses from outside the region provides short-term relief as nurses leave these areas. Given the ongoing problem of nurse shortages in the regional and remote regions of Australia there is a growing need to improve recruitment and retention strategies (Bushy, 2002; Courtney, Edwards, Smith & Finlayson, 2002; Hegney et al., 2002; Lenthall et al., 2011; Preston, 2009).

Several strategies have been employed in addressing the issue of recruiting and retaining nurses in regional and remote areas in Australia, Canada and the US. These have included financial incentives, bonded scholarships, housing subsidies,

increased professional development, and advertisements about the regions local tourist attractions (Bushy, 2002; Hegney et al., 2002; Huntley, 1995; Miller, 2011; Rogers, Searle & Creed, 2010). These strategies, however, have yet to prove successful.

Recruitment of nurses into rural areas from the local population is considered a viable strategy to address the nursing shortage. This strategy enables the opportunity for residents to gain pre-registration nursing qualifications in their local community (Lea, Cruikshank, Paliadelis, Sanderson & Thornberry, 2008; Nugent, Ogle, Bethune, Walker & Wellman, 2004). There is growing evidence that providing nursing education within rural areas may well provide a more sustainable workforce (Playford, Wheatland & Larson, 2010; Wood, 1998). It is mooted that a self-sufficient nursing workforce in these non urban regions could partway assist in solving the problem of nurse shortage. Self-sufficiency, where net movements are close to zero, could reduce the reliance on recruitment outside the region.

It has been identified that completing part of a nursing program in a rural setting is an effective workforce strategy in both Australia and the US (Playford et al., 2010). Studies have not delineated between regional or remote areas and analysis of the research has shown that the settings have been in large inner regional areas or outer regional areas (Birks, Al-Motlaq & Mills, 2010, Gum, 2007; Playford et al, 2010). Given that there are differences in healthcare provision and education opportunities between regional and remote towns and communities, it appears pertinent to make an investigation specific to a remote area. Paucity exists in the literature on graduates from nursing schools in remote areas.

Since 1999, Notre Dame Broome Campus has offered pre-registration nursing programs, in an attempt to improve access to tertiary education for people in the remote region of the Kimberley. Prior to this study it was not known how many graduates from the University pursued employment in Kimberley hospitals, nor the factors that influenced their decision to stay or leave the region.

It was the researcher's knowledge of the recruitment and retention issues within the nursing workforce in the Kimberley, together with an increasing concern

regarding meeting the healthcare needs of the community, which led to this study. The researcher has worked as a nurse and midwife in various hospitals within the region for 25 years and in addition has undertaken several roles at Notre Dame, Broome for the past 11 years. These roles have included sessional lecturing, clinical coordination, program development, and course coordination. It could be argued that the researcher's role during this study was prejudiced, but concern for quality healthcare for people in the remote Kimberley area was the impetus for this study. Additionally, use of reflexivity and dialogue with others minimised potential biases.

## **Aim**

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the factors that influenced remote school of nursing graduates in their decision to work in a Kimberley hospital in the remote region of WA.

## **Objectives**

The objectives addressed in this study were:

- To describe the demographic characteristics of nursing graduates and their connections to living in a remote area;
- To describe the factors that influenced nursing graduates to seek employment in Kimberley hospitals;
- To describe what factors influenced the Kimberley nursing workforce and their choice to work in a Kimberley hospital;
- To determine if nurses in hospitals in the Kimberley considered graduates from Notre Dame, Broome to be prepared for work in Kimberley hospitals and whether there was sufficient professional development to support them;
- To describe the factors that nurses, and nurse managers in Kimberley hospitals considered might influence Notre Dame, Broome nursing graduates to work in a Kimberley hospital.

## **Significance of the study**

This study is the first to focus on graduates from a remote university school of nursing and the factors influencing their decision to work in a hospital in a remote area. Whilst other studies in Australia have focused on the effect of attending clinical

placement in a rural area, they have not differentiated between regional or remote settings. Neither have they investigated whether students from urban backgrounds attending study, or clinical placement, have been recruited into a hospital in a remote area. Thus, the findings from this study could have significant implications for healthcare agencies recruitment and retention strategies.

Further, this study has relevance to other remote areas attempting to address nurse workforce shortages. Additionally, it will provide relevant information to policy makers to consider adjusting the current nursing workforce model to suit remote areas. The model would have implications for an appropriate nursing skill mix and educational support. The findings could also have an effect on shaping future policy and funding to rural tertiary education campuses in Australia, and nursing recruitment into regional and remote healthcare agencies.

### **Summary and thesis structure**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study. It discussed the problem underpinning the study together with its aim, objectives and significance. The brief background introduced in this chapter is further explored in chapter two, where the geographical location and context of the study is presented. This study hinges on an understanding of remoteness; the difference between regional and remote contexts and the challenges isolation presents to the healthcare workforce in particular the recruitment of graduate nurses. As such, an explanation of the various classification systems used in Australia to define remoteness, are discussed.

The context will also cover the provision of pre-registration nursing education in remote areas of Australia as well as describing the Kimberley nursing workforce. An explanation of the curriculum Notre Dame, Broome School of Nursing and Midwifery uses is also provided.

Chapter three provides a comprehensive overview of the literature surrounding the nursing workforce shortage in Australia, with a particular focus on the challenges to recruitment and retention in non-urban areas. The literature rarely differentiates between rural and remote, rather it discusses rural and remote together

under the term rural. This has the potential, for an undiscerning reader, to assume that there is little difference between a rural or remote setting. Highlighted is the paucity of literature addressing recruitment and retention challenges for remote areas, as is the lack of literature on what influences a graduates decision to work in remote nursing. The final part of this chapter discusses the theory of decision-making as it was considered a theory that could highlight underlying factors that influenced graduates to work in a remote area of Australia.

Chapter four presents the methodology of the study, including the case study approach and rationale for its use. Details of the design, data sources, sampling and recruitment processes and the steps taken for data analysis are also provided. The following diagram (Figure 1.1) illustrates the data collection process and timeline which is described in more detail in chapter four.

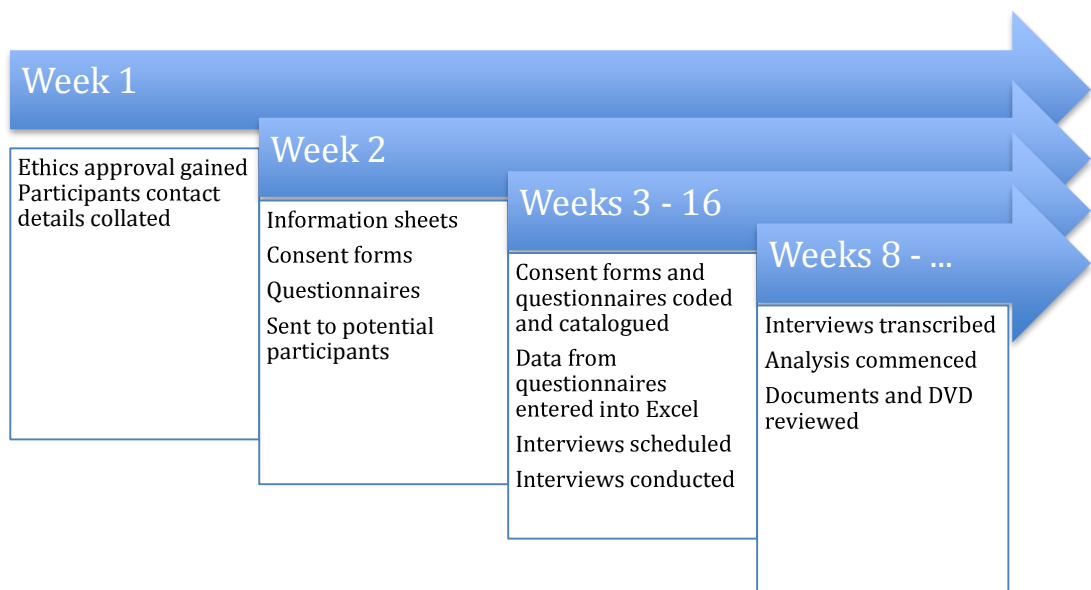


Figure 1.1 Data collection process

As demonstrated in Figure 1.1 the data collection process commenced immediately after ethics approval. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted during the researcher's 6 months sabbatical. Transcription and analysis of this data was intertwined with data gathered from all participants, documents and a promotional DVD. The methodology chapter concludes with the steps taken to ensure rigour, along with ethical considerations and the process used for approval to undertake the study.

Chapter five details the findings of the study. It discusses these in relation to the four distinct data sets; graduates, workforce nurses, nurse managers and archival documents including a promotional DVD. Findings from the graduates are juxtaposed with the remaining data sets. A synthesis of the findings concludes the chapter.

Chapter six brings the thesis to a conclusion. It discusses the findings in relation to the literature identified in chapter three together with current studies, which assist in interpretation from a holistic perspective. The decision-making theories form part of the concluding chapter. It closes with the study's limitations and recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

This introductory chapter has provided the prologue to the thesis. It identified the problem of nurse shortage in remote areas and has portrayed the aim, objectives and significance of the study. Since this is a qualitative study the following chapter will discuss the context surrounding the influences on graduates decision to stay, or leave the Kimberley. The context is an important component of case study research, it provides the situation and background to the phenomenon in question (Yin, 2014).