



RURAL ALLIED HEALTH: A CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY ON THE USE OF EVIDENCE IN DAY TO DAY CLINICAL PRACTICE



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Background and Purpose:

Allied health professionals are expected to use evidence in day to day clinical practice. While there is an existing body of knowledge in regard to this topic, there is a lack of context specific knowledge in rural NSW. This research explored the use of evidence in day to day clinical practice by a range of allied health professionals working in rural Area Health Services in NSW.

Method:

A self completed anonymous survey of all allied health professionals working in rural Area Health Services in NSW was conducted. The response rate was 13%, with 293 surveys completed. Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were undertaken.

Results:

The majority of respondents use evidence at least weekly (82%), with 54% using evidence daily. Differences were found in the extent of use of evidence when the type of training received was compared ($\chi^2=26.45$, $df=4$, $p < 0.001$), with respondents with multiple sources of training most frequently using evidence, while those with no training reporting the least frequent use. Differences were found when the extent of evidence and professional groups were compared ($\chi^2=31.39$, $df=6$, $p < 0.001$), with Psychologists reporting the most frequent use and occupational therapists reporting the least. Differences were also found when comparisons were made between different AHPs working different lengths of time in their profession ($\chi^2=19.11$, $df=3$, $p=0.003$), with those working less than 5 years using evidence most frequently, and those working between 11 and 15 years using evidence least frequently. A wide variety of sources of evidence were used, including the use of clinical policies, procedures or guidelines and discussions with other professionals. The most frequently identified reason for using evidence was for patient care. Factors impacting on the use of evidence in day to day clinical practice were analysed and significant differences found between a number of these. A range of barriers to using evidence were identified, the most frequent being sufficient time. A variety of strategies were identified that may help improve the use of evidence.

Conclusions:

Allied health professionals in rural NSW Area Health Services frequently use evidence and believe it improves patient care. Continued strategies to maximise the use of evidence in this context include appropriate training, increasing the availability of specific strategies such as clinical guidelines, structured journal clubs and using online libraries with pre-existing research critiques. All clinicians should consider that when providing advice to their peers, this is considered a source of evidence, and thus there is both an obligation and an opportunity to consider the available evidence in these discussions.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Richard has worked in health for 25 years, the majority of them in a rural Area Health service. His experience is primarily in physiotherapy and allied health roles. His interest lies in maximising effectiveness of health care delivery for patients, through the use of evidence, whether through clinical interventions, or through system and process implementation.



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