



# Nurse Executives: Internal and external influences in the management of small rural hospitals



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Small rural hospitals play a pivotal role in serving communities that would otherwise lack acute and community services. There is little research however into the internal and external influences on the nurse executive in the management of rural hospitals and in the provision of health service delivery.



**Aim:** The aim of this study is directed towards developing an understanding of the internal and external influences on the nurse executive in the management of small rural hospitals. The objective of the analysis is to better inform the health service research agenda of the realities of managing a small rural hospital.



**Methods:** Using a two staged approach this paper draws on a questionnaire in the first stage, and semi structured interviews with respondents in stage two. There were 11 eligible survey participants within a convenience sample of one area health service. Using a mail out questionnaire both demographic and qualitative data was sourced, to which 10 nurse executives responded. Responses to the Questionnaires were themed and ranked by frequency of response. The themes formed the conceptual framework for the 10 follow up interviews.



**Results:** Themes from the content analysis of the interviews were grouped into three categories: external influences (community, Department of Health/influential bodies, general practitioners), internal influences - organisational (financial management, information technology, resources and support), internal influences - nursing (recognition and value, education, leadership, recruitment and retention).



**Conclusions:** The study provides an understanding of influences from which nursing executives of small rural hospitals face distinctive challenges both operationally and professionally. The role is not simply one of health service delivery in a rural setting but rather a complex web of imperatives and relationships in balancing the profession with organisational goals and short-term performance.



**Implications:** The study may greatly benefit future research in examining the effects of the diversity of influences in formation of nursing workforce strategy and strategy development for rural health service delivery. Additionally, material derived from this study gives some indication of what should be incorporated into any framework for learning about rural health management.

*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'*

Debbie is the Area Nurse Manager of policy and evidence based practice and is based at Port Macquarie. Debbie has experience and qualifications in both nursing and management and has worked in rural NSW for nine years.



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