Emergency Medicine training for medical students in a rural community

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Introduction
General Practice experience in small rural communities has been part of medical student training for many years. Integrating the rural context of specialist practice into the undergraduate curriculum is more difficult.

Aims
To stimulate medical students' interest in the particular challenges and professional satisfaction of emergency medicine practice in the context of small rural communities.

To “extend” students with practical applications of new knowledge and skills

To encourage students to consider such communities as part of their career practice in the years to come.

Syllabus
A wide range of emergency topics are covered including:

• Ambulance response, field management, extrication, transport and triage
• Environmental extremes of heat, cold, altitude and exposure
• Envenomation and toxicology
• Trauma and burns
• Emergency radiology and imaging
• Splintage and casting
• Intravenous access and fluid administration
• Airway management and ventilation
• Emergency management in environmental extremes

The weekend concludes with a full scale, time critical, disaster scenario within the local community.

Methods
Thirty medical students from the University of Tasmania Rural Clinical School travel to the community of Smithton (population 3500) each year to undertake an intensive weekend of emergency medicine teaching. Nurses from the local hospital and student ambulance officers attend as observers.

Local General Practitioners, the local hospital, ambulance and emergency services volunteers, all play a major part in providing this teaching.

Engagement with the community is an essential part of the weekend and role players from the community are active participants in the scenarios.

Students stay in the community and as far as possible, all catering, transport and other practical needs are sourced from the local area.

Support and instruction is provided by emergency physicians and other specialists from the regional referral hospital.

Outcomes
Feedback from all participants has been overwhelmingly positive

What do the students learn?
• Acquiring new knowledge and new skills
• Practice and reinforce old skills
• Developing inter-professional relationships between medical, nursing, and paramedic services
• Understanding role and skills of emergency services
• Understanding role, limitations and capabilities of small rural hospitals
• Recognising the importance of teamwork in the rural context
• Appreciating the vital role of volunteers in rural communities
• Social interaction with peers, instructors and the local community

What do the instructors learn?
• The high level of skills of rural GPs
• The human face of local GPs - previously just a “referral” voice on the telephone

How does the rural community benefit?
• This community is now seen by students as the most popular “remote” rotation in later years of the undergraduate course
• Rural communities can play a major role in the education of the next generation of medical practitioners
• A long term investment in young doctors returning to practice in the community

Recommendations
• Extend this teaching to other remote communities in North West Tasmania
• Consideration of similar programs in Surgery, Anaesthesia and Obstetrics
• Develop vertical integration with junior doctor, GP and specialist registrar training

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State Emergency Service, Smithton
Tasmanian Fire Service, Smithton
Tasmania Police, Smithton
Circular Head Council
The community of Smithton, North West Tasmania

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