‘Partner or Perish’
Narratives from the field about collaboration for reform

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Some Self Evident Truths

- Partnership and collaboration are essential in the health reform journey
- Challenges are multi-faceted and complex
- We, and our partners, come with a variety of agendas, values and imperatives
- These are not always initially recognised and articulated
Framework for our narratives

• ‘Healthy ageing in rural communities’ theme

• Partnerships developed based on a core group, and extended to embrace other expertise needed by individual projects

• Across faculties and disciplines, funders, providers, policy makers, NGOs

www.utas.edu.au/ruralhealth
Narratives across three projects

• Cradle Coast pilot study of needs and aspirations of older people

• Two HACC-funded projects on ‘Healthy Eating for Healthy Ageing’

• ARC Linkage grant project on triggers for social disengagement for older people in rural communities

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Narrative: Project 1

• Beginning the team journey
• Sharing understanding on the perceived gaps in service models across disciplines and with policy makers
• Some expertise was recruited for the short-term e.g. economics, demographics
Narrative: Project 2

- Shared recognition by researchers, HACC and nutritionists that existing services are not sustainable and are not meeting need
- Rigorous debate of issues identified by research indicated diversity of interpretations based on professional positions
- Identification through debate of a major knowledge gap
- Strengthened future research and professional development agendas
Narrative: Project 3

• Larger project, more diverse team, formal structures

• With complexity of project and expansion of the team new researcher/policy tensions emerged: cultural, structural and personal

• Potential to ‘unlink’ the linkage
Narrative: Project 3 (cont)

- Need to address underlying issues as well as manage project
- Re-identification of ‘team’ and ‘partner’ and what they mean
- The ‘policy group’- parallel but separate and different - principles for developing shared understanding and respect
- Threat became opportunity; value added to project
- Shared scanning of, and debate about, health reform environment
Findings

• Managing research collaborations is much more than managing research projects – tensions are inevitable
• Not just a policy and service reform journey
• Shared understanding and management of strong egos and agendas
• Recognition of, and respect for, personal and organisational value systems
• New tricks for old dogs!!