

Securing our region's future medical workforce



JAMES COOK
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA





JCU's Formula for Success: 'from, in, with and for'

JCU medical student at a clinical skills session in Townsville



Dr Marie Tran - Mackay Intern 2019



Dr Kane Langdon volunteering at a health booth in Gladstone



MBBS2 students on their first rural placement in the Atherton Tablelands



JCU medical students with volunteer patient at Townsville Clinical School



MBBS5 student Joanne Kaczmarek from Thursday Island



Dr Kate Bialy - JCU GP Fellow and Medical Educator

Rural communities suffer poorer health outcomes than their city counterparts and yet have less access to health care. A local, broadly skilled health and medical workforce is essential for regional, rural and remote communities to be able to access high quality health care as close to home as possible. This is what James Cook University is dedicated to achieving.

JCU's formula for success: 'from, in, with and for'

James Cook University (JCU) is Australia's most successful university in producing medical and health professionals who go on to provide health care for regional and remote communities.

The JCU formula for success is backed by Australian and international evidence: admit students to health professional programs who come from the communities of greatest need and provide them with a high-quality education and training experience in, with and for those communities.

More than 70% of JCU medical students are from regional communities. Their education and training is entirely regionally-based. Students have extensive positive learning experience in small rural and remote towns and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In addition, JCU is active in developing regional pathways for graduates into specialist GP and consultant training in the north. JCU is the provider of GP training across most of regional Queensland. This is real 'end-to-end' training for a regional, rural and remote medical career.

JCU's graduate tracking research shows that 75% of medical graduates go on to work outside of metropolitan areas, around two thirds at any point in time. In marked contrast to elsewhere, half of JCU's medical graduates go on to careers in General Practice and Rural Generalist Medicine, with the rest pursuing consultant specialist practice, mostly in regional locations.

The experience of JCU demonstrates the most cost-effective solution for delivering a medical workforce for regional, rural and remote locations is through the vertical integration of medical training that is based in and designed for the needs of regional Australia – from admission to medical school through to specialist Fellowship and beyond.

Invest in success for the North

JCU has been steadily transforming the medical workforce landscape of northern Queensland, but more needs to be done. The region remains heavily reliant on bringing in doctors from overseas to fill job vacancies and on temporary locum doctors brought in from elsewhere. In spite of its outstanding track record, JCU's medical school has the smallest allocation of Commonwealth supported places in medicine (medical CSPs) of the Queensland medical schools.

With more doctors for population than ever before, Australia desperately needs more doctors in regional Australia, particularly in the north. Geographic maldistribution is the primary challenge. It is very clear that relying on a 'trickle out' of doctors from the cities to the regions is no solution. Importing temporary medical labour from overseas only ends up adding to doctor numbers in major cities as initial Medicare and visa restrictions lapse.

The single most important priority for Australia in national medical workforce reform is to invest in a substantial pipeline of domestic medical graduates who willingly pursue remote and regional careers in General Practice, Rural Generalist Medicine and consultant specialist practice.

This is the only viable solution to the challenge of an imbalance in doctor numbers between metropolitan areas and regional locations and Australia's excessive reliance on overseas recruitment. This is what JCU has been most successful at.

To create a sustainable local workforce, there needs to be a shift in focus to 'grow our- own' and 'develop-our-own' across the health workforce more broadly, with an emphasis on building upon proven successes achieved by regional and rural-focused institutions such as JCU.

The proposal: more medical school places for northern Queensland

JCU's medical school is based in Townsville with major Clinical Schools in Townsville, Cairns and Mackay. Currently, Cairns and Mackay support students in the later years of medical training only. Additional medical places will not only boost graduate numbers in the region, it will also allow JCU to offer full end-to-end training in locations beyond Townsville. This will significantly enhance JCU's impact for northern Queensland communities and provide social, economic and scientific benefits for our region.

Townsville: Building on existing capacity

JCU's Townsville Clinical School is the exemplar of an effective regionally integrated model that takes in students from the regions, providing positive rural curriculum and placement experiences throughout medical school, connects through to pre-vocational training of junior doctors and on to vocational training to a GP Fellowship or other specialty. An additional 10 medical CSPs will allow for the expansion of current infrastructure, allowing JCU to bolster its current capacity in Townsville.

Cairns: Activating the opportunity

The generous \$60 million commitment by the Australian Government to the Cairns University Hospital project through JCU is an acknowledgement of the critical role JCU plays in addressing

our region's workforce challenges. There is a continuing shortage of medical professionals in Far North Queensland.

Additional medical places will complement the new Cairns Hospital development and significantly bolster the capacity of the regional medical workforce in Far North Queensland.

A total of 40 medical CSPs in 2023 (including 20 places from the 2022 Election campaign commitment) would allow JCU to offer the full Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery in Cairns. It will help build the knowledge industry in health and medicine and enhance job and career opportunities for communities of the Far North.

Mackay: Laying the groundwork

Expanded infrastructure at the Mackay Base Hospital would assist in delivering critical education and health research capacity to the Greater Whitsunday Region and assist in future proofing the growing health workforce needs of the region. The expansion will not only facilitate end-to-end medical training in Mackay but also provide the opportunity for expansion of a range of health professional course offerings currently available in the region.

30 medical CSPs and a further commitment toward regional infrastructure at the Mackay Base Hospital of approximately \$70 million will help JCU to develop in Mackay the same kind of training pathway it has firmly established in Townsville and is currently creating in Cairns.

Partnering with JCU: a proven track record in boosting the health workforce of regional Queensland

✓ By providing a positive rural experience during the clinical years at JCU, graduates are six times more likely to practice in regional, rural and remote communities.

✓ Of around 2,000 JCU medical graduates to date, more than 1,000 are working in regional and remote areas (62% on graduate tracking data).

✓ Many small towns that were once struggling to recruit and retain medical staff are now more stable and relatively well-supplied.



“ JCU has a reputation for shaping well-rounded and grounded junior doctors who have innumerable character-building, eye-opening and hands-on experiences behind them. I hope to serve in the most remote realms of Australia and our world. ”

Dr Katie Marsden, JCU Medicine Graduate

Health workforce and health systems strengthening in the Western Pacific

The Western Pacific is a region of special importance to Australia. Our near neighbours look to Australia for leadership, and the international community expects Australia to have a deep understanding of and commitment to the region. There is a renewed vigour in Australia’s determination to play a stronger leadership role in the Western Pacific. Health systems strengthening and health workforce are critical priorities.

Additional medical school places at JCU will expand opportunities for northern Queensland students to undertake internationally relevant, world-class training regionally and in the Western Pacific that will lead to careers with impact in northern Australia, the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Medical education at JCU already has a strong emphasis on global health in the Western Pacific. Hundreds of students participate in placements under the Australian Government’s New Colombo Plan and many undertake core medical training terms in Fiji and elsewhere. There is an extensive network of collaborators and alumni across the Asia Pacific region, including Papua New

Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and other Pacific Island nations. JCU’s longstanding institutional and personal relationships are characterised by two-way capacity building and exchange.

With the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine and two designated World Health Organisation Collaborating Centres in key areas of relevance to the Western Pacific, JCU is at the cutting edge of research and two-way capacity building in, with and for tropical populations.

In recognition of the regional imperatives and opportunities in health workforce, JCU is proposing establishment of a Tropical Global Health Workforce Centre. This will include dedicated ‘Global Health’ domestic pathways in medicine, nursing and midwifery, veterinary medicine and biomedical sciences and research higher degrees. The proposal also includes scholarships to enable students from our regional neighbours to complete the Global Health Workforce Program and development of curricula and expansion of international clinical teaching capacity for geographically distributed health professional education.

James Cook University graduates are the cornerstone of Australia’s regional and rural health workforce

Between 2016 and 2020, more than 85,000 recent health graduates* responded to the national Graduate Outcomes Survey**, 2.3% were from JCU. **Despite being a minority, JCU is crucial to delivering a health workforce to regional, rural and remote communities.**

In Queensland, JCU graduates account for **nine per cent** of recent health graduates **but more than forty per cent** of recent health graduates in **outer regional, remote and very remote** locations.**



Nationally, **1 in 5** recent health graduates in **outer regional and remote locations** are **JCU graduates.****



* ‘Health Graduates’ includes the following undergraduate programs: Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Psychology, Rehabilitation, Health services and support. **Source: Graduate Outcomes Survey, 2016-2020. Raw dataset supplied to JCU by Universities Australia, accessed 27 April 2021. Survey produced and reported by Social Research Centre.