



**Postgraduate Diploma [Advanced Nursing]
Primary Health Care – Rural**

Survey Results

Prepared by

Gytha Lancaster
Nurse Advisor

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1. Introduction

Since the funding has been devolved to individual District Health Boards for postgraduate education for nurses there is a concern that access for rural nurses has again become more difficult. In the past the rural funding allocation for nurses was managed by the New Zealand Institute of Rural Health (NZIRH), who together with Auckland University provided an academic rural pathway for nurses which was achievable and easily accessed.

Due to concerns that the benefit to the rural sector which had been gained by the graduation of rural nurses with the Rural diploma has not been sustained with the devolvement of the funding to the District Health Boards, NZIRH surveyed the cohort of nurses who undertook the Rural Diploma through NZIRH and Auckland University with the aim of applying to Health Workforce New Zealand to provide the same service again. The survey was to provide evidence of the success of this type of access to postgraduate study for rural nurses and the benefits to the rural health sector as a whole.

A survey was initially emailed out to all 83 nurses who had started the Rural diploma course covering 4 intakes of which 79 graduated. Some email addresses were no longer valid (19) and surveys were posted out to the physical address for these nurses of which 4 were no longer valid. Of the 83 surveys issued 30 were returned completed. These comprised of 6 out of the first intake, 10 out of the second, 3 out of the third and 11 out of the fourth intake. A copy of the survey is in appendix 1.

2. Nursing Career of the Cohort

The nurses came from a wide range of roles within the rural health sector from practice nurses to rural nurse specialists, from rural hospitals to Maori health providers. A wide range of skills and experience was represented and the description of their roles was extensive with many working in isolation.

2.1 Postgraduate Qualifications Completed

Of the 30 Rural diploma graduates who responded, 4 were now Nurse Practitioners with one more currently applying for NP status. 15 graduates had continued study to Masters level with another 4 currently studying towards Masters. 16 others had the Rural diploma and 5 also had another certificate, one was completing their prescribing practicum. 3 were undertaking a diploma in leadership. A third of those who completed the survey were still undertaking postgraduate study at some level.

2.2 Change of Roles

Of those who responded 8 had since changed their roles while 21 had stayed within the same role but were practicing differently. 27 still worked in a rural area. They came from a variety of regions covering a large part of rural New Zealand from the far north to the Chatham Islands. All were still continuing to practice as a nurse with one not completing the question although previous answers would indicate they are still practicing.

2.3 Mentor

A large proportion (25 out of 30), of the nurses provided mentorship for fellow nurses and 15 (50%) received professional supervision themselves.

2.4 Impact on Clinical Practice

Several common themes emerged from the answers to this question.

2.5 Confidence

Many expressed how completing the Diploma had helped them gain confidence in their practice which had a flow effect in the confidence their clients have in them.

"My clinical practice has changed completely I now have the skills to feel confident in management of patients and being able to give advice and improve health outcomes".

Improved knowledge base: The increased knowledge base, the ability to think critically and to utilise evidence based practice was also mentioned by several of the respondents. Not only was it the improved knowledge base but also the ability to source new knowledge and apply it within their practice which many believed enhanced their practice. "I am better able to assess and develop treatment with the advanced knowledge I now have and it is showing in our diabetic and chronic care patient outcomes".

2.6 Improved Clinical Assessment Skills

Several of the respondents mentioned the improved clinical assessment and diagnostic reasoning skills they had obtained from the Diploma and how this had affected their practice. They reported improved patient outcomes following earlier diagnosis than would previously occurred and in a couple of instances miss diagnosis and medication errors "I have also picked up on more issues for my patients including incorrect diagnosis and medications".

2.7 Leadership

Some of respondents expressed how the increased knowledge base, clinical skills and confidence had facilitated them into taking a leadership role "given me the knowledge and confidence to take on an advanced nursing leadership role". It has also lead to them encouraging their colleagues to undertake postgraduate education "Completing the diploma has lead me to encourage other nurses to complete postgraduate study to enhance their practice".

2.8 How has the diploma impacted on patient outcomes?

Many of the respondents expressed how the changes in their practice had lead to improved patient outcomes, "I am better able to assess and develop treatment with the advanced knowledge I now have and it is showing in our diabetic and chronic care patient outcomes". Some of the improved outcomes have come from the nurse being able to empower the client to self manage their chronic conditions and resulted in fewer hospital admissions, "Advanced nursing skills attained in PG Dip and MN have improved client outcomes in relation to clients bring empowered to self manage the early assessment and treatment of acute exacerbation of COPD and avoidance of hospital admission. This has impacted on and improved relationship and economic outcomes with clients' families". The nurses appear to also being looking at the bigger picture and having influence over a larger arena and recognise the need for prevention and early recognition, "The main impact is an understanding that for many we need, as a service, to be a lot more aggressive in identifying i.e. early identifying/screening, commencing treatment/medication and ensuring follow-up that honours the client and their work that they do towards self management".

3. Impact on Work with other Health Professionals

3.1 Recognition

Many of the nurses expressed the recognition and respect they now received following the completion of the Diploma "A feeling of equality comes with extra study and the respect other professionals show you helps in working relationships", "Seems to give me more "credibility" in other professionals eyes". Some of the recognition has come from changes in the language the nurse now uses with a number stating how they are now more articulate and able to question and debate, "I remember becoming aware of a

change in my language (when speaking to doctors especially) and a reciprocal change in the value which they placed on my assessments and progressions/recommended actions". For some at first the recognition came with a price as nurse colleagues saw them as a threat, but with time and evidence in the change in practice (more autonomy), nurse colleagues could see the benefits, "but many are now seeing the advantage of more autonomy and greater knowledge base". One nurse expressed how the Diploma has increased the respect for the nursing profession as a whole, "It has resulted in others having more respect for nursing as a profession ".

3.2 Wider Influence

For some the recognition and respect gained from undertaking postgraduate study has led to being able to have a wider influence within rural health, "Influencing policy at organisational PHO/DHB level, working at National level around Maori Health/Iwi Provider issues in Primary Health Care", "I used quality improvement processes to demonstrate where changes were necessary/justified and led case reviews to model collaboration and a patient centred quality approach which had not been occurring beforehand".

3.3 Leadership

Respondents are expected to take leadership roles and actively engage with the wider primary health team members, "Expected to take lead roles within practice", "am able to confidently work with other health professionals, collaboratively and understanding their roles better to plan and develop better processes of rural health care, has opened more doors for me to access other health professionals". The change in the nurses practice and the recognition and respect they have gained together with increased autonomy they have within their practice has influenced others to commence postgraduate study, "Like to think that at least two nurses have started on this pathway", "Has a flow on effect, encourages others to study, allows sharing of new skills and knowledge within team increases in some cases, level of respect and level of approval for our service".

4. Comments on the Rural Diploma

Issues in relation to the postgraduate programme administration, academic content or associated were identified.

Many took the opportunity to comment on the diploma itself or the organisation. For some the support of the group who took the course with them was fundamental to their successful completion. For others the networking which happened with the group provided practical help for coping with practice issues, "The sharing with others who were also working in rural remote areas was invaluable and taught me practical skills for coping with a whole range of home/community based situations" Some expressed how the organisation and funding method had made all the difference to their starting and completing post graduate study "Firstly if the programme had not been fully funded and supported I would probably never have embarked on PG studies". Others expressed how they continue to be in contact with others from the group and how valuable this has proven to be "Networking with others in similar roles has also provided a great resource over the years".

For some the way the funding and course was organised made it possible for them to undertake the study, "I would not be where I am now if this had not been available". Others commented on the course itself, "It was a great course - well thought out with both practical and theory parts - both to a very high standard". There was some disappointment from one respondent around the lack of availability at the time of a clinical masters programme, "One disappointment has been that we were informed that there was no clinical masters programme available at the University of Auckland - so consequently changed universities. I have recently returned to The University of

Auckland in the first semester of 2010 to complete the prescribing practicum there next year if funding is available”.

5. Contact with Others from the Diploma Cohort

The majority of respondents were in contact with between 2 or 3 of their cohort on a regular basis. Some of these were work colleagues whilst others were from a similar geographical area. Interestingly others still had email contact with up to 6 from their group on a regular basis. Some recognised the longer it had been since they had completed the Diploma the less contact they had. Many expressed the desire to maintain contact with the group on a long term basis.

6. Conclusion

The survey has demonstrated the benefits obtained from undertaking the Rural Diploma with many nurses identifying a change in the way they practice. Most have gained confidence in their capabilities and this has been acknowledged by the recognition and respect they have gained from other health professionals. Patients have benefited from the increased knowledge and improved critical thinking of the nurses with improved patient outcomes.

Many of the respondents continue to keep in touch with their fellow course participants and are continuing to benefit from this networking. The nurses have become leaders in their areas and are mentoring, supporting and encouraging their colleagues to undertake postgraduate study.

It is clear from comments made that the funding, organisation and support they received while undertaking the Diploma is what made it possible to complete.

Appendix 1

Postgraduate Diploma [Advanced Nursing] Primary Health Care – Rural Survey

1. General Information

Name _____

Postgraduate Qualifications (completed)

Current postgraduate study being undertaken

Postgraduate Diploma [Advanced Nursing] Primary Health Care – Rural studied in which years? (please circle)

2003-2004

2005-2006

2004-2005

2006-2007

Would you be willing to participate in a telephone focus group meeting?

Yes/No (please circle)

If yes, contact phone number _____

Most suitable time to contact you _____

2. Nursing Career

What was your role at the start of the Postgraduate programme?

Title:

Description (brief outline of key aspects of role):

What was your role at the conclusion of the postgraduate programme?

Title:

Description (if different from above):

Are you currently practising as a nurse? (October 2010)

Yes/No (please circle)

What is your work role now (October 2010)?

Title:

Description (if different from above):

Are you currently practising in a rural location?

Yes/No (please circle)

If yes, please specify region:

Do you act as a mentor for any colleagues?

Yes/No (please circle)

If yes, please describe:

Do you participate in regular professional supervision?

Yes/No (please circle)

If yes, please describe:

3. Postgraduate Diploma [Advanced Nursing] Primary Health Care – Rural Evaluation

How has the diploma programme impacted on your clinical practice?

How has the diploma impacted on patient outcomes?

How has the diploma programme impacted on work with other health professionals you interact with?

Are there any issues in relation to the postgraduate programme administration, academic content or associated aspects you would like to share with us?

Do you retain contact with fellow postgraduate students?

Yes/No (please circle)

If yes, how many and how often:

Thanks for your assistance, we will forward you a copy of our report.

Thank you, please return to:	Robin Steed New Zealand Institute of Rural Health 9 Anzac Street Cambridge
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