The experience of new graduate nurses in rural practice: A phenomenological study

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that it does not contain any material that has been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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ABSTRACT

In Australia, rural nursing is a distinct practice and rural nurses constitute the largest group in the rural health workforce. However, the rural workforce is ageing, the turnover of nurses in rural areas is high, and attracting nurses to these areas is increasingly difficult. The possibility of attracting a substantial number of nurses from metropolitan and urban areas remains remote whilst there is an overall shortage of nurses. Thus, rural health services are experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties, and a lack of attention to these workforce issues from universities, rural and remote nursing organisations, and the Federal Government has further compounded the situation. Despite this, little is known about the recruitment and retention of new graduates in rural health areas and the potential long-term investment they could offer to rural health services. In addition, there has been very little research conducted which specifically focuses on the new graduate’s experience of rural nursing practice. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the journey of transition for new graduate nurses in rural practice and to develop an understanding of the meanings that graduates have of their transition experience.

This phenomenological study was conducted in eight rural health care facilities of northern NSW. Role Theory and its associated concepts of professional socialisation and reality shock provided the theoretical framework that guides this study. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with ten new graduate nurses who were making the role transition from student to registered nurse within rural practice settings. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, and three major themes emerged from the data, which represented stages of the graduates’ journey of transition.
The findings from this study demonstrated that there are specific aspects of the transition experience that are unique to graduate nurses within rural practice settings. Furthermore, issues within rural practice settings that impact on the recruitment and retention of new graduate nurses in the rural nursing workforce were identified. It is hoped that the findings from this study will be utilised by nurse academics when preparing undergraduate students for rural nursing practice and also by area health services to assist with planning and implementing graduate nurse programs so that new graduate nurses will be retained within the rural nursing workforce. Finally, this study highlights the overall recruitment and retention problems faced by the rural nursing workforce which will add significantly to the nursing literature and alert the nursing profession to the current employment issues faced by rural graduates.