



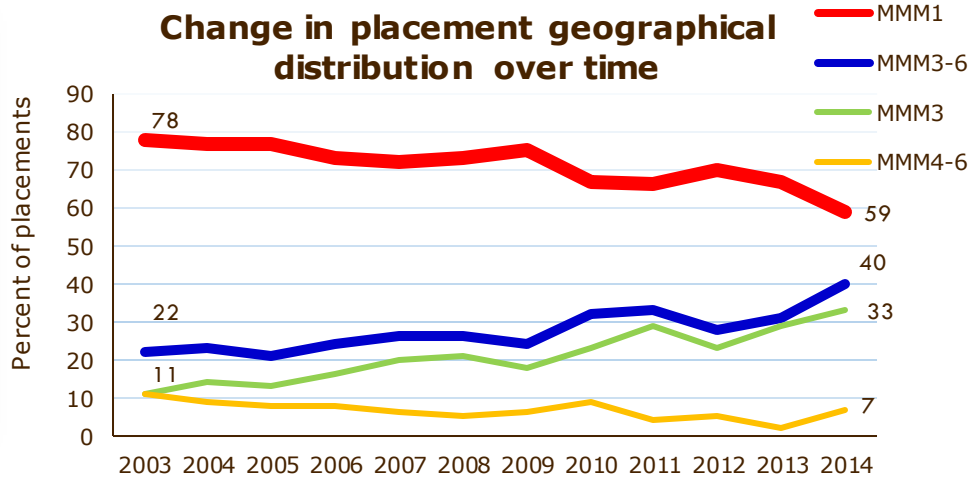
The changing landscape of physiotherapy student clinical placements: An exploration of geographical distribution and outcomes across settings

CL Johnston¹, L Wakely², CJ Newstead^{1,3}

¹ Discipline of Physiotherapy, School of Health Sciences, The University of Newcastle, NSW; ²University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health, Tamworth, NSW; ³Discipline of Physiotherapy, School of Community Health, Charles Sturt University, NSW

Background and aims

As numbers of physiotherapy students in Australia increase, there may be a greater reliance on rural healthcare facilities to provide clinical education. It is unknown as to whether a shift in placement distribution away from a historically metropolitan dominated pattern has occurred in recent years and whether placement outcomes are equivalent. This study aimed to describe the geographical distribution of physiotherapy clinical placements and to investigate the relationship between geographical setting and placement assessment outcomes.



Method

A retrospective cohort design was used. Year of study, placement type, geographical location and the students' grade were recorded for all block clinical placements undertaken by UON physiotherapy students between 2003 and 2014. Geographical locations were further classified using the Modified Monash Model (MMM). Ethics approval for the study was gained from the UON HREC (No2012-0430)

Results

Data from 3964 placements were included. The change in distribution of placements is displayed in the graph. There were significant differences in median assessment mark between placements classified as MMM1 (80/100) and those classified as MMM 3 (84/100), MMM4 (86), MMM5 (83) and MMM6 (90).

Conclusions

The change in distribution of placements may reflect increasing student numbers, more regional physiotherapy programs and greater efforts to enable students to undertake rural placements, The shift in geographical distribution of placements may have a positive effect on the rural workforce. Further research is required to investigate the differences in assessment mark and determine the specific training and support needs of students and clinical educators in rural settings.