

‘Being in a place where it matters’ – A Qualitative Investigation into the Factors Motivating GPs to Work in Aboriginal Health Services

This research was completed by Mr Shaun Prentice, Assoc. Prof Jill Benson and Dr Taryn Elliott.

Why did we conduct this research?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face considerable discrepancies in their health and wellbeing compared to non-Indigenous populations. A key strategy for addressing these discrepancies is ensuring a strong healthcare workforce is in place
- Despite offering placements in Aboriginal Health Services (AHSs) in the AGPT program to GP registrars, there remains a shortage of GPs in this sector
- Understanding the factors that have motivated GPs to pursue a career in Aboriginal health will help improve recruitment to, and retention of GPs in, AHSs
- Previous research has examined the career motivating factors for GPs working in rural or under-served areas (RUAs), identifying a variety of factors including personal background, age at entry to medical school and having a strong sense of social justice
- To date, there has been no research specifically examining the career motivating factors for GPs working in the Australian Aboriginal health sector, thus the relevance of previous RUA research is unknown
- There has also been no research examining the experiences of GP registrars who have completed AHS placements. Understanding these experiences will provide critical information for developing strategies to promote AHS placements and improve future registrars’ experiences in AHSs

What did we aim to investigate?

- Broadly, we sought to understand why GPs who are working in AHSs made this career decision. Our four specific aims were to understand:
 1. What positive factors motivated this career decision?
 2. What barriers did GPs face in making this career decision?
 3. How were these barriers overcome?
 4. How could the training organisation improve to help others overcome the identified barriers?

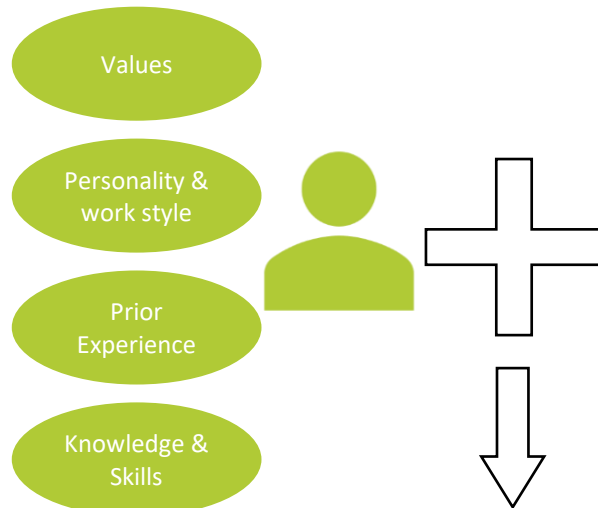
What did we do?

- Semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately half an hour, were conducted with eleven GPs working in the Aboriginal health sector who trained through the current RTO (GPEX), and previous RTPs (Sturt Fleurieu Education and Training, and Adelaide to Outback GP Training) and had undertaken an AHS placement during their training
- These interviews were thematically analysed to identify the main ideas expressed by participants

What did we find?

- When asked why they decided to pursue a career in Aboriginal health, participants identified the following factors:
 - Organisational or work factors, for example finding the work rewarding; enjoying taking a holistic approach to their patients’ health; and appreciating the support of clinic structures
 - Building relationships with patients, colleagues and the community
 - Enjoying teamwork
 - Pre-placement motivations regarding an interest in Aboriginal culture or health; feeling an ethical duty to work in this sector; or prior exposure to Aboriginal communities
 - Exposure to the sector and experiencing Aboriginal health firsthand
 - Learning about and developing an appreciation for Aboriginal cultures

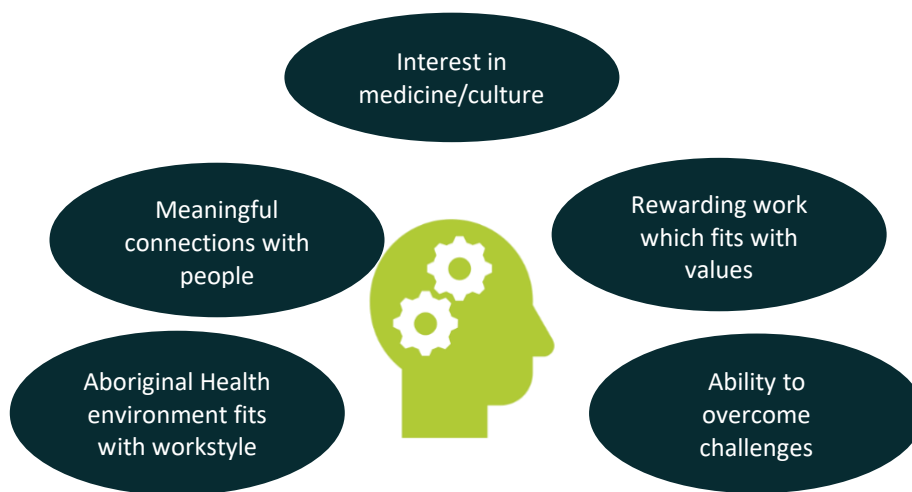
People come to Aboriginal Health with:



At the placement they experience:



These combine to form career motivations:



- Participants identified a number of barriers they have experienced while working in Aboriginal health, including:
 - A lack of resources and support, for example few job opportunities
 - The impact of political decisions on healthcare operations
 - Managing and being sensitive to cultural differences
 - Limited training opportunities, regarding both the number and duration of placements
 - Complex clinical cases
 - Acknowledging the role of social factors in their patients' health
 - Emotionally challenging events
 - Unpredictability, particularly around patient attendance
 - Difficulties striking a healthy work/life balance

- In the face of these barriers, participants reported employing a variety of strategies, including:
 - Drawing on the support and knowledge of others, both internal and external to the AHS
 - Undergoing self-reflection and change practices, including developing cultural sensitivity and awareness, assertiveness and self-reliance
 - Making an effort to engage with the community
 - Being empathetic to their clients' needs by taking their perspective on health issues
- When asked about areas where the training provider could have improved, participants gave suggestions in five domains:
 1. Providing more AHS placements and offering extended (i.e. 12 month) placements
 2. Establishing specific orientations for each AHS to familiarise registrars with the local community's history and culture
 3. Providing more advanced public health, mental health and drug/alcohol management training
 4. Establishing specific mental health support services for AHS registrars
 5. Establishing a specific mentorship program for AHS registrars

How does this relate to previous research?

- A variety of similarities in the career motivating factors for RUA and AHS registrars were identified, including strong social justice values and exposure to working in the sector
- Nevertheless, there were new career motivating factors identified for AHS registrars, including building relationships.
- Although there were few overlaps between the barriers and strategies to overcome barriers identified by participants in this research and the RUA literature, there has been little investigation of these factors generally

What will we do with these findings?

- We will work with our Aboriginal training posts to meet the specific needs of AGPT registrars training within AHSs by addressing participants' suggestions for improvement. For example, we are emphasising to training providers the importance of their role in supporting registrars to build positive experiences. We have also adapted our orientation and cultural awareness workshops to reflect these findings
- These findings provide an insight into the experiences of AHS registrars. This allows for more accurate promotion of AHS placements when recruiting registrars, for example emphasising the rewarding nature of the work, or the opportunities for teamwork
 - We acknowledge that this research only considers one side of registrars' experiences in Aboriginal health; we cannot infer what dissuaded those registrars who had AHS placements but did not continue working in Aboriginal health. This will be the subject of a future study.

How are these findings being communicated?

- The findings have been shared and discussed at the South Australian and National Cultural Mentors Workshops; Aboriginal Practice Managers Workshop; and a NATSIHWA Forum
- This project was presented at GPTEC18 and the 2018 AIDA conference
- A manuscript of the project is currently being drafted to publish the findings in the medical education literature

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