Pre-registration nursing degree students in rural Victoria: Characteristics and career aspirations

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Abstract

This paper describes the preliminary phase of a longitudinal research project involving students enrolling in three different pre-registration nursing programs in two locations in rural Victoria, Australia. This initial report discusses the demographic characteristics, entry pathway, course choice and career aspirations of students enrolled in these programs at both the main rural campus and an outreach satellite school of a major Australian university. Demographic findings from this study demonstrate that most of participants were female, aged between 18 and 50 years. The majority of participants resided in non-metropolitan areas and were enrolled in the flagship Bachelor of Nursing Program, with a large number having entered their chosen course of study via a non-traditional pathway. Career projections reported by participants demonstrate the intention of those from non-metropolitan areas to remain in this location on completion of their studies. Participants indicated their preferred areas of future practice to be in midwifery, emergency and paediatrics. Overall the findings of this part of the study summarise the characteristics of students entering nursing courses via various mechanisms. Exploration and comparison of these characteristics raise a number of issues for discussion, particularly in relation to conversion of level 2 (enrolled) nurses to level 1 (registered) status, and intended career specialisation and location of practice for students of nursing in rural areas.