

## Shaping rural health service delivery through consumer engagement: the potential of digital storytelling

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Dr Amanda Kenny holds a PhD in rural health policy. She is an Associate Professor in Rural and Regional Nursing at the La Trobe Rural Health School in Bendigo, Victoria. Mandy is widely published internationally and is frequently invited as a key speaker at national and international conferences. She has conducted extensive research and consultancies, with an emphasis on rural workforce development. Her current research and educational development is part of an international collaboration that is exploring ways in which consumer participation can be enacted at a service delivery level to improve the quality of health care. Central to this, is work utilising reflective digital storytelling as a means of humanising health care. Using the creative process of digital storytelling, she is working with rural health professionals, consumers and carers to develop and deliver responsive, consumer centred services.

Pip Hardy is a founding director of Pilgrim Projects Limited, a UK-based education consultancy specialising in aspects of health care quality improvement. Together with fellow director, Tony Sumner, Pip established the Patient Voices Program as a direct and accessible way of communicating patients', carers' and clinicians' experiences to those who design and deliver health care. The use of new technology brings the ancient tradition of storytelling to life and offers new possibilities for involving and engaging stakeholders and improving the quality of health care. The digital stories in the Patient Voices Program are now being used extensively in the UK National Health Service, in schools of medicine and health care throughout the English-speaking world and beyond, to remind us all of our shared humanity and the importance of compassionate and humane care. In early 2010, the Patient Voices Program won the prestigious BMJ award for Excellence in Healthcare Education.

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A digital story draws together the elements of creative writing, photos, keepsakes, music and digital technology to create a short but powerful video clip. Over 250 digital stories have been developed by the UK based Pilgrim Projects. The 'Patient Voices' initiative (<http://www.patientvoices.org.uk>) attracts international interest, significant funding and the Directors of Pilgrim Projects were awarded the 2010 *British Medical Journal* excellence in health care education award.

In April 2010, a digital storytelling workshop was conducted in Bendigo in rural Victoria in collaboration with Pilgrim Projects. The workshop resulted in the production of ten digital stories that were made by consumers and health care professionals. The digital stories that were developed at the Bendigo workshop are being used to support rural health consumers, health professionals, and health science students to explore the concept of recovery and develop rural health services that reflect government policy initiatives that are focused on greater consumer involvement.

In this highly interactive and enjoyable workshop, participants at the National Rural Health Conference will have the opportunity to explore digital storytelling and the Patient Voices program. The stories are told by people of different ages, from different cultures, about different conditions and experiences. Each story is as unique as the storyteller. All of the stories are freely available for use within education and service improvement initiatives and offer viewers opportunities to reflect on practice and health care experiences, discuss key issues and insights and develop empathy and understanding. Digital storytelling is a powerful stimulus for students and health professionals to understand the lived experience of consumers and provides significant encouragement for professional reflection.

Participants at the workshop will have the opportunity to explore the process and methodology used to gather the stories. They will engage in discussion about the uses of the stories and the potential of digital storytelling to transform and humanise rural health education, research and rural health service delivery. The exploration of the process will include viewing of the Bendigo recovery stories and hearing about the process from the consumers and health professionals that participated. Participants will have the opportunity to develop a short story of their own and see how their experience could be captured, distilled and shared to support those who develop and implement health care strategy and those who deliver health care to act in a more informed, effective and reflective manner.

