

## Providing access and equity for rural patients through clinical pharmacy services

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### Objective

To ensure the provision of a comprehensive clinical pharmacy service at Latrobe Regional Hospital (LRH), a Victorian regional hospital, in order to maintain the integral and vital risk management strategy and cost-effective care for patients and the hospital.

### Method

A variety of strategies were examined in relation to two issues.

First, the prevention of incidents—clinical pharmacists' contribution to medication safety is multi-faceted and often their contribution is unacknowledged because the detection of medication and therapeutic errors, or near misses, occurs prior to medication administration.

Second, recruitment and retention of clinical staff—this has always been more difficult in rural localities compared to metropolitan areas.

### Results

A number of strategies have been implemented at LRH that have assisted in maintaining the level of clinical pharmacist staffing, which has meant the service remains safe and efficient.

These have included:

- focusing on clinical functions such as providing a medication history as soon as possible after admission, with the aim of reducing medication errors
- ensuring that medication safety receives the appropriate attention through the continuous review of medications and the identification of systems requiring improvement
- having pharmacy technicians assist the pharmacist in non-clinical work, to allow pharmacists to concentrate on clinical functions
- providing a culture of professional development within the department, which includes a weekly clinical meeting to develop the clinical skills of the pharmacists
- promoting LRH to pharmacy students as a recruitment strategy.

### Conclusion

Where there are pharmacist shortages, as is evident in many rural areas, staff have to increase their percentage of time spent on medication supply, which can result in a reduction in access to clinical pharmacy services, with the concomitant threat to risk management and cost-effective care. The strategies implemented at LRH have successfully addressed these issues.