

## Nursing special interest groups in the rural and regional sectors—effective for advanced practitioners or not?

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The formation of nursing special interest groups (SIGs) has been deemed instrumental in the provision of interprofessional support and mentorship. SIGs offer important forums to discuss professional issues relevant to practice and for members to offer and receive valued input into professional activities conducted by the SIGs. The development of effective SIGs are particularly important in rural and remote nursing sectors and are beginning to emerge as a potential strategy to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses at all levels along the nursing continuum of novice to expert; effectively investing in the future of rural and regional nursing.

The development of a SIG group purported to provide a learning environment conducive to the nurse practitioner role was developed in one regional area of central Victoria to support the regional and rural/remote nurse practitioners. The SIG arose out of a need to offer a supportive environment for nurse practitioners, both endorsed and neophyte, and for potential nurse practitioners as they progressed through the transitional phases of expressing interest in the role through to successful endorsement. In addition the SIG was viewed as a means of addressing the requirements of professional development post-endorsement with members undertaking advanced clinical, scholarly and research activities. Thus concentrating on the development of productive and supportive professional networking endeavours and survival strategies the implementation of the SIG was deemed anecdotally effective.

Questions arose and centred around whether or not the groups' members were indeed on the right track and was the SIG indeed offering an environment that was conducive to the needs of the group. Unfortunately there is a paucity of information explicitly focusing on nurse practitioner SIGs from either an international or national level. There is certainly no research-derived information related to nurse practitioner SIGs.

This presentation will discuss research findings of the formation, implementation and evaluation phases of a nurse practitioner SIG. It is envisaged that the research-derived conclusions will add to the body of nursing knowledge.