Preparing orientation information for psychiatry trainees
A guide for rural health services

The rural environment is an important and distinctive context for psychiatric practice, offering unique opportunities and challenges. Providing comprehensive information about the practicalities as well as the benefits of working in a rural setting can help attract and also retain trainees.

What is this guide?
This guide is designed to help rural health services provide orientation information to psychiatry trainees when they are considering and/or beginning a rotation in a rural area. It provides a checklist of the types of information that trainees would find useful and that would be helpful to your service in preparing orientation information.

Of course, each service is different and some points will not be relevant for your situation, while you may need to add others that we haven’t included here. This guide covers recommended topics and is not mandatory. The guide does not cover the terms and conditions of employment.

Why did RANZCP develop this guide?
The RANZCP developed this guide in response to feedback from trainees about their rural training experiences. Trainees noted that detailed orientation information would have helped them adapt to local work practices more quickly and help them, and their families (where applicable), to settle into the local community. The aim is to improve the experience of living and working in a rural area, and in turn improve patient care.

Who should be reading this guide?
This guide covers what RANZCP considers to be essential information for rural health services to provide psychiatry trainees undertaking a rotation in a rural area.

A ‘rural health service’ in this guide refers to health services located in RA2-RA5 as per the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA) system.

For New Zealand, it is suggested that this guide is relevant to health services where trainees work with rural communities, especially in more isolated geographical areas.

Have you covered?

✔ LOCAL SERVICES AND AMENITIES
  - Amenities
  - Transport and safety
  - Social, recreational and cultural activities
  - Accommodation
  - Childcare and schools
  - Health care and support services

✔ ABOUT YOUR RURAL HEALTH SERVICE
  - Patient profile and population health
  - Referral pathways

✔ TRAINING INFORMATION
  - Lines of clinical responsibility and duties
  - Training and training program flow
  - Formal education requirements

✔ CLINICAL CARE
  - Patient boundaries and confidentiality
  - Mental Health Act and involuntary patients
  - Home visits
Local Services and Amenities

When considering a rural position, trainees need information on local amenities and any other services within the community that may be required during their stay, including orientation to the local area.

Amenities
Inform the trainee of:
• local supermarkets
• nearby laundromats and dry cleaners
• libraries
• local restaurants and cafes
• accessing internet and wifi.

For consideration: Is wifi available at your health service? Does the trainee need to arrange their own internet service? Are there mobile phone coverage issues the trainee should be notified of?

Will the trainee need a map and detailed instructions on how to get around? Is there someone available to give the trainee a tour of the area?

Transport services and safety
Inform the trainee of:
• public transport options and costs
• access to health service vehicles
• car parking and cost of parking
• risky areas to bike ride or drive
• any areas to avoid.

For consideration: Will the trainee be required to travel long distances? Proximity of public transport stations? Does the trainee require their own car? What are the safety considerations?

Social, recreational and cultural activities
Moving to a new town can be isolating, and you should ensure the trainee is provided with information on activities outside of work. A positive experience outside of work is crucial to ensure the trainee gets a positive impression of the area.

Inform the trainee of:
• sporting groups, health clubs and gyms
• social clubs
• places of worship and services
• parks and gardens
• walking/cycling routes
• movie theatres
• local markets.

For consideration: What sort of social clubs operate at your health service? Are there local sports teams the trainee can be involved in? Do the local places of worship hold any functions the trainee could be made aware of?

Accommodation
Some trainees will have already arranged accommodation prior to their rotation starting, others will rely on your assistance to help set them up.

Inform the trainee of:
• accommodation managers or contacts at your health service to assist with accommodation
• accommodation options in proximity to your health service
• cost of accommodation options
• any relocation allowances
• cooking facilities or where to buy kitchenware.

For consideration: Is the accommodation furnished or will trainees need to bring or buy their own furniture? Are there contact numbers for removalist companies you can provide the trainee? Is there a range of housing options for trainees with families at differing price ranges?

Childcare and schools
It is important to remember that often a trainee will be bringing their family with them on their rural rotation and this can be a major change for the family. Being sensitive to this and assisting where possible will go a long way to ensuring the trainee has a positive experience.

Inform the trainee of:
• contact details of childcare services and schools
• any childcare facilities that your health service may provide
• after hour care programs and school holiday programs.

For consideration: Proximity of childcare and schools to the health service, and costs. Consider making arrangements with local childcare agencies for priority placements – for example through liaison with the local council. Can you provide a contact person for assistance with childcare places?

Health care and support services
Ensure that trainees can access medical and allied health care when and where convenient as well as workplace based support for the duration of their rotation.

Inform the trainee of:
• health services available to trainees such as allied health and general practitioners
• local pharmacies
• counselling services and workplace-based counselling services
• peer support groups and mentoring programs.

For consideration: Are there local GPs who have agreed to see other doctors?
About your Rural Health Service

Provide the trainee with information about your health service, the mental health service and clinical team they will be working in. Additional information will assist the trainee to understand the local population and mental health issues in the community.

Patient profile and population health

So that trainees have a greater understanding of the factors that influence the mental health of the local community, a snapshot of the local population as well as population health figures may be helpful.

This could include the following information:
- population demographics such as age and language and cultural diversity
- proportion of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or Māori in the local community
- key employment industries in the area
- instances of recent hardship, such as large scale job losses, droughts or other natural disasters that could potentially affect the mental health of the community
- prevalent mental illnesses in the area
- common mental health presentations at the rural health service
- common models of service delivery in the local community.

Referral pathways

Inform the trainee of common referral pathways, including different types of facilities within your health service, such as Prevention and Recovery Centres (PARC).

Referrers may include:
- General practitioners
- Psychologists
- Community health teams
- Aboriginal health workers
- Occupational therapists
- Other allied health practitioners.

Training Information

Lines of clinical responsibility and duties

Provide the trainee with as much information as possible on their expected duties at the beginning of their rotation. This may include information on the lines of responsibility for day to day work, supervision, incident reporting, on-call, leave entitlements and applying for leave.

For consideration: If the trainee does not have a car, what arrangements are available during on-call periods? What is the structure and signing off procedure for on-call?

Training and training program flow

Provide the trainee with an outline – verbal or written – of what to expect from the rotation, including duties and expectations of supervision.

For consideration: Where will the trainee be placed first, and what will their core role be? Who will they be liaising with – general practitioners, mental health workers, psychologists? Will other trainees be doing the same rotation? How often will they meet with their supervisor? Will other consultants at the health service provide supervision if needed?

Formal education requirements

Ensure that service delivery does not come at the expense of trainee formal educational requirements. Trainees should be informed of allowances for study time and educational activities.

For consideration: Are there arrangements for the trainee to take time off to participate in a study group? What approval process must the trainee go through? Can the trainee access educational webinars? Are there library, internet and videoconference facilities available for virtual study and existing peer support networks within the rural health service that the trainee can join?
Clinical Care

Patient boundaries and confidentiality
Working and training in a small rural community often means the trainee is more visible to patients outside of work. Confidentiality can be a critical issue in a rural area. For example, community members may be reluctant to acknowledge a problem for fear that others in the community will find out. Patients may travel to another area to avoid seeing a psychiatrist they know in their own community.

Provide trainees with protocols around confidentiality and patient boundaries as well as information about what to do if a patient approaches them outside of work wishing to discuss their treatment or the treatment of a family member.

Recommend that the trainee purchase personal insurance in addition to any health service insurance they may already be covered by.

Mental Health Act and involuntary patients
Brief the trainee on how involuntary patients and involuntary treatment is undertaken and ensure trainees understand their responsibilities and obligations under the relevant Mental Health Act.

For consideration: What are the rural health service policies towards involuntary patients? Will the trainee receive training in admitting patients under the Mental Health Act? This includes the administration of medication, the use of seclusion and admission procedures.

Home visits
Safety issues and protocols of travelling on home visits to patients should be covered with the trainee.

For consideration: Is the patient a high-risk patient? Will there be other people at home? Is it advisable for a supervisor to accompany the trainee?

FURTHER INFORMATION
You can find further resources on rural psychiatry for psychiatrists and trainees on the RANZCP rural psychiatry webpage www.ranzcp.org/rural

DISCLAIMER
The information set out in this publication is intended for use as a guide of a general nature only and may or may not be relevant to particular circumstances or individuals. Persons implementing any recommendations contained in this publication must exercise their own independent skill or judgement or seek appropriate professional advice relevant to their own particular circumstances when so doing.

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