



JAMES COOK  
UNIVERSITY  
AUSTRALIA

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE & DENTISTRY

# Extended rural medical placements deliver value.

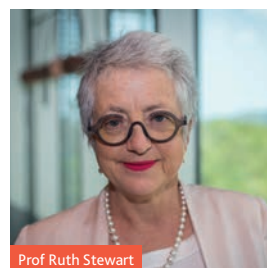
*Making Rural Health Matter*

[jcu.edu.au/cmd](http://jcu.edu.au/cmd)

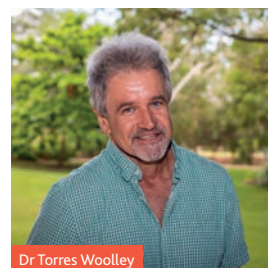




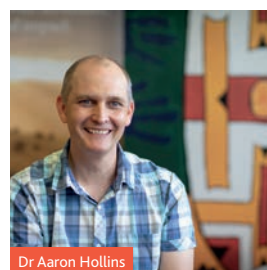
Lily Aboud and Annabelle Faint on placement in Longreach in 2021.



Prof Ruth Stewart



Dr Torres Woolley



Dr Aaron Hollins



Prof Tarun Sen Gupta

## Changing the conversation from one of cost to one of value

### Extended rural placements for James Cook University final-year medical students deliver a 7.6-fold return on investment, an Australian-first study has found.

The peer-reviewed study, by Dr Torres Woolley, Professor Tarun Sen Gupta, Prof Ruth Stewart and Dr Aaron Hollins, assigned a dollar value to the educational and workforce benefits of sixth year JCU Medicine students undertaking five-month Integrated Rural Placement (IRP) or 10-month Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) programs.

Dr Woolley said the study, published in the Rural and Remote Health Journal, was the first social return on investment (SROI) study of the impact of health professional education in Australia.

He said the methodology, combining quantitative and quasi-qualitative data collected via a survey, was unique and

accounted for prior student intention to work rurally.

The SROI from JCU's extended rural programs between 2013 and 2019, after students graduated and entered the workforce, was calculated at \$7.60 for every dollar spent, taking into account the benefit of the students' increased clinical skills and confidence for their internship year, and the rural medical workforce benefit of increased willingness to work in a rural or remote town as a doctor specialising in rural medicine.

"This positive return-on-investment from extended rural placements is important evidence for shifting the conversation around supporting these programs from one of cost to one of value," the authors concluded in the study.

Between 2012 and 2018, sixth-year students who undertook an extended placement had significantly higher mean scores than the other students in self-reported clinical skills, readiness to work in

first week of internship and ability to apply knowledge.

Professor Sen Gupta, Head of the JCU Clinical School in Townsville, said the extended placements allowed final-year students to develop their skills, live in a rural town, develop their interest in rural medicine, and form their identity as rural doctors.

The sought-after extended placements have grown to involve about 20-25 students each year. They are in addition to the 20 weeks every JCU medical student spends on rural placement during their degree as part of the JCU College of Medicine and Dentistry's commitment to building a fit-for-purpose medical workforce for underserved communities in Queensland.

"The bottom line here is that, beyond the educational benefits of the longitudinal placements, there is a substantial economic benefit in terms of increased likelihood of people working rurally and working for longer," Professor Sen Gupta said.

## Benefits to the student

Extended rural placement participants reported being significantly better prepared for being a doctor

Greater depth & breadth of clinical skills

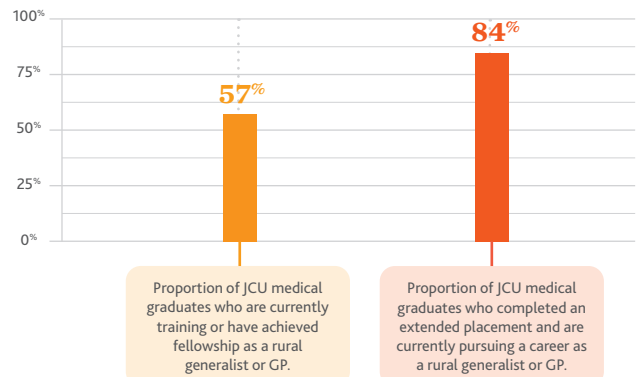
Increase in clinical confidence

Increase in communication skills

Increase in cross-cultural skills

## Benefits to the workforce

Influence of extended placements on vocational training choice



## Of final-year Australian medical school students:



nominated **general practice** as their preferred specialty in 2018<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Medical Schools Outcomes Database National Data Report 2019

## Of JCU medical graduate respondents who did extended placements:



reported intending to have a career in **rural and remote practice** (MM4-7\*)



reported they were pursuing a career as a **generalist or general specialist**



were practising in a **rural or remote town** (MM4-7\*) in 2019

\*Modified Monash Model for classifying rurality. MM4 = medium rural town, MM5 = small rural town, MM6 = remote community, MM7 = very remote community.

**“Spending a dollar on this program is actually returned many times over. There are benefits to the individuals, but there are benefits to society as well. That argues the case for more investment in our programs.”**

He said JCU Medicine graduates were much more likely to practise in non-metropolitan settings and to be generalist specialists.

“The old-fashioned view was always you learned everything in the big hospitals, whereas we’ve turned that on its head,” Professor Sen Gupta said.

“We’ve said ‘actually you learn where the patients are because you’re close to the decision making’. We’ve got some strong evidence.

“Our commitment to rural people is about providing workforce, offering access to education, and offering placement in those towns so all of our graduates understand rural medicine.

“We have an obligation, particularly to the most underserved, the rural and remote communities. What it means is, firstly, providing workforce. We try to recruit students from those communities, and one reason is they’re more likely to go back, but it is also democratising education.

“We think we’ve got a duty to prepare people who are technically good but also see that they have a responsibility to address workforce needs. They’ve had a values-driven medical education, so they understand social accountability and responsibility to communities.”

### READ THE STUDY:

<https://www.rrh.org.au/journal/article/6597>

# \$7.60

**Return on investment** for every dollar spent on JCU extended rural placements



Gabrielle Keating on placement in north west Queensland in 2021.



“

When you're on an extended placement, it's more than just a taste of various tasks. You're getting the opportunity to put skills into practice over and over, so you become really comfortable with them. ”

**Georgia Bulley**  
JCU Medicine sixth-year student, 2021



## JCU Extended Rural Placement: 'the best decision I've ever made'

Extended placements are a part of JCU's commitment to making rural health matter. Students like Georgia Bulley are not only making a valuable contribution right now, they are also gaining the experience and passion to become doctors who serve our regional, rural and remote communities.

Sixth-year JCU Medical student, Georgia Bulley, had a feeling she would enjoy rural generalism. So, she committed a year of her life to find out for sure. For almost the entirety of 2021, Georgia undertook a Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC), an extended placement offered by JCU that is based in a northern or western Queensland rural or remote town.

Based on a recent study, published by JCU researchers, these extended placements have tremendous value for the communities in which these students serve. The study found that every \$1 invested produced a \$7.60 return in social value.

Georgia shared with us some of her thoughts from her experiences, the contribution she is making to remote health and how the extended placement profoundly changed her life.

### Giving rural generalism a proper go

I was born and raised in Townsville and spent the first five years of my degree there. It got to the point where I just wanted to get out to experience somewhere different.

I had an interest in the rural generalist pathway and an extended placement was a good fit for that. I knew it would show me that if I loved it, then it was something I could commit to, and if I didn't love it then I had given it a pretty good go!

Applying was a simple process; you just select the extended placement option and your preferred location. I had the option of Cloncurry, Longreach, Mareeba (which was my second choice), Emerald and Thursday Island. I thought, 'how can you not put down one of the most beautiful places in Queensland?' So I chose Thursday Island.

### Initial thoughts on the placement and location

I was very nervous coming to Thursday Island. I don't think I knew much about it or just how remote it is! After my first week of being here, I was like 'Oh God, what have I done!?' There was not much in terms of shops or facilities there was a sense of isolation (the closest places are an hour and a half by plane!). The culture shock hit me hard, but I think I adjusted quite quickly.

---

**Turns out, it's been the best decision I've ever made.**

---

### '100% ready for internship'

The level of clinical skills I've gained by being in the same region for this amount of time is insane. I don't think it would be the usual experience sixth-year med students get in metropolitan hospitals. I've performed cannulations, phlebotomies, contraception insertions, finger blocks and I've assisted with other minor procedures like removing toenails and reducing fractures. I've also assisted with anaesthetics which was exciting. I got to essentially run a sedation procedure myself, under the supervision of a doctor. When you're on an extended placement, it's more than just a taste of various tasks. You're getting the opportunity to put skills

*Making Rural Health Matter*



into practice over and over, so you become really comfortable with them.

I am also doing history taking and performing examinations to do a management presentation to the doctor. I do that nearly every day. It's helped me improve my clinical judgement and patient assessment. The whole experience is really fast-tracking my development. I feel 100% ready for internship now.

#### **A trust that comes with time**

The relationships I have formed with the doctors here adds so much to the experience. I think it's that trust that has led to me being able to do more of the complex medical and clinical work. There are fewer doctors here and I know they've appreciated me being here for the whole year because they don't have to continuously build up the rapport and provide the same training again after 10 weeks. I think they're at a stage now where they're happy with me and trust that I know what I'm doing.

#### **The benefit for the community**

People here really appreciate it when you're here for a longer period. They're more like to open up to you after they've seen you in the community for several months. I think that relationship facilitates a preventative health care approach. I had a patient come in with boils and in that presentation I flagged underlying issues including type two

diabetes. We spent 20 to 30 minutes talking through diabetes and how to address it.

To me, this is what rural generalism is all about. You go into these areas, where there are poor health outcomes, and they don't have the same access that people do in the cities. There are people who haven't been seen by doctors for years, or who have all these significant comorbidities. You feel ecstatic when you can get them on to something like a diabetic medication and have a small impact on their life. I love that here you can really make a difference in people's lives. It gives me a lot of satisfaction.

#### **Extended placement means you're embedded in the community**

It's been a good place for me to develop personally. You're forced out of your comfort zone professionally and personally. The people are just so beautiful up here. I've had to learn to be better at accepting help or kindness from others. People just want to give you things and look after you. They cook for you and take you out all the time.

When we were in Bamaga, we met this beautiful family who invited us over dinner. It came up that we hadn't explored much because we didn't have a car. They just gave me their car keys and said keep the car for a

week! It's just incredible how people go out of their way for you here.

#### **How to make the most of the experience**

I know there are students who have come up and not enjoyed the placement at all. Everybody just sees the beautiful pictures of these islands and they don't see how isolated it is. If you're used to the city comforts, it can be daunting.

It's the classic 'it is what you make it' experience. You need to be the type of person who is willing to put yourself out there. These types of opportunities don't just come to you if you don't go out and you talk to people and make friends, community members. If you do get out of your comfort zone, you might find that this experience will change your life.

---

**“The LIC has changed my life quite drastically. It's making me a better person and a better doctor. It's just a great experience and I would not do it any other way.”**

---



JAMES COOK  
UNIVERSITY  
AUSTRALIA



Published 19 October 2021 Volume 21 Issue 4 - Rural & Remote Journal

Woolley T, Sen Gupta T, Stewart RA, Hollins A. A return-on-investment analysis of impacts on James Cook University medical students and rural workforce resulting from participation in extended rural placements. Rural and Remote Health 2021; 21: 6597. <https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH6597>