

6 Showcasing the work of RCBI

Day Two of the meeting commenced with a presentation by Dr Ellen McIntyre from PHC RIS, providing a 'Birds Eye View' of the activities and achievements from RCBI University Departments in 2003. The presentation was drawn from a review of the 2003 Annual Reports from the 17 RCBI University Departments funded in that year with comparisons made to key indicators from the 2002 reports where possible. It was acknowledged that annual report data has some limitations, particularly as different Universities define common terms in the annual reports differently and a number of University Departments report the activities of the Department as a whole, whilst others report only on work which they identify as being directly part funded under the RCBI. Nonetheless, some significant trends in the types of activities being undertaken were identified. Some of the data provided for the 2003 year included the following:

- academic courses in general practice, medicine, public health and health promotion, allied health clinical practice, and clinical epidemiology at all levels were conducted by 12 RCBI funded University Departments;
- 13 RCBI funded University Departments coordinated 22 research networks during 2003, with the networks varying in format and aims;
- all RCBI funded University Departments had participated in collaborations, with the reasons for collaboration varying from research planning and grant applications, to research projects, and educational activities;
- all 17 RCBI funded University Departments had collaborated with Divisions of General Practice during the year;
- across RCBI funded University Departments there were 189 educational activities conducted during the year, reaching over 3,639 participants;
- over \$15.6 million in research grants were obtained by RCBI funded University Departments during 2003, with an overall success rate for grant applications of 69%; and
- during 2003, 12 RCBI funded University Departments reported publication of 130 peer-reviewed papers.

There were some noteworthy changes between 2002 and 2003, including one less RCBI funded University Department in 2003. For example, there were declines in the number of PhD and Masters students, educational activities and peer-reviewed papers. On a number of other indicators there were significant increases, including:

- an increase in mentoring from 82 people in 2002 to 266 people in 2003;
- network membership grew from 631 members in 2002 to 1377 members in 2003;
- external funding increased from \$9.3 million in 2002 to \$15.6 million in 2003; and
- the success rate in grant applications rose from 38% in 2002 to 69% in 2003.

Following from Dr McIntyre's presentation there were two sessions to showcase the impacts and outcomes of the work of RCBI programs. Presenters from each State and Territory gave short presentations on aspects of their work related to one of four topics:

- dissemination of research;
- research training strategies;
- funded positions to undertake research; and
- research networks.

Professor Peter Mudge, University of Tasmania, in his presentation on research networks suggested that a 'golden nugget' award be given at each year's national meeting to a University Department who had demonstrated a particularly innovative way of working or an interesting and successful approach to an aspect of the work within the RCBI. Professor Mudge suggested, and the audience seemed to agree, that this year's award would be given to Ms Karen Piper, of the Centre for Remote Health, NT, who showcased their work on disseminating research findings in the Northern Territory. This work involved the Centre for Remote Health in 'research transfer' to remote Indigenous communities through a series of radio programs on health topics presented on the Indigenous Broadcasting Service.

The first time a show went to air, the Centre chose the topics and the talent with the show presented by a professional radio journalist. This had mixed success, so in 'Mark II' Karen described how the Centre worked with 30 broadcasting/media students from Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education – with the PHC RED Strategy providing the health expertise and the sources of information, and the students controlling the selection of topics and the development and presentation of the radio segments, while also contributing their media and broadcasting expertise. The students consulted local Aboriginal communities in local languages to find out their most important health issues and then developed and produced a series of five segments under the banner "Healing Our Culture". These segments were presented by Aboriginal people. The meeting participants were able to listen to part of one of these highly successful radio segments.

Overview of workshops

Showcase sessions were followed by workshops at which participants considered good practices that are emerging as a result of one of the four areas of work. Following is a brief overview of key suggestions arising for the workshops.

Dissemination of research

There was strong view across the meeting that in the future research findings needed to be more widely disseminated than they have been to date. Targets of PHC RED funded research findings include:

- Divisions of General Practice and other primary health care providers who hopefully will take up the results of the research;
- the Department of Health and Ageing;

- interest groups in the area of research;
- participants in the research; and
- relevant consumers and communities.

A number of participants showcased the work that they had done in this area, including skilling up people in writing journal articles and getting them published. This work was well received by the meeting, but it was considered that many strategies are needed to get information out to the widest range of audience, particularly to policy makers and clinicians and consumers who may be able to use the results of the research.

Research training strategies

The workshop group concluded that novice researchers who have been trained through RCBI should be integrated into other areas of Universities besides the RCBI and be mentored by others in the University. This would build sustainability of the PHC RED Strategy by integrating with existing University Departments rather than having new researchers only connected to the RCBI. It was also suggested that ‘research brokers’ were needed to support novice researchers in finding grant sources, applying for grants and accessing information needed to conduct research.

Research training strategies in the next cycle of the PHC RED Strategy will need to continue to be tailored towards the needs of a range of target audiences from the very experienced researcher to those who have had no prior research experience.

Funded positions

It was noted by meeting participants that few consumers and Indigenous people are in funded positions, eg fellowships, scholars, bursaries and the Researcher Development Program (RDP). Although a number of consumers applied for RDP placements, none were successful and the level of applications was generally poor. Some suggestions made by meeting participants to improve this situation were:

- ensuring that consumers interested in funded positions are coupled with a ‘mentor’ in both applying for and using money
- ensuring that guidelines for PHC RED funding, such as RDP, are broad enough to encompass the interests and expertise of consumers and Indigenous people as appropriate.
- tracking fellows over time to monitor the impact of their fellowships/training on primary health care research and evaluation – such information could be fed back into improved programming.

Research networks

The workshop group exploring research networks supported the immediate inclusion of information on current networks on the PHCRIS web page and in printed form. They also wanted to see PHC RIS coordinate links to resource materials and education sessions and training courses in due course.