



Department of Rural Health

# Research Capabilities Statement

## The UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF RURAL HEALTH (Tasmania)

The University Department of Rural Health, Tasmania is a multidisciplinary department committed to improving access to health care and contributing to improved health outcomes for people in rural and remote areas by:

- **Working collaboratively to achieve an adequate, appropriately trained and stable rural health workforce;**
- **Facilitating access to appropriate education and training opportunities, resources and on going support across the learning continuum, and**
- **Conducting and supporting research on issues of rural health and health services.**

The University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) is part of the Faculty of Health Science at the University of Tasmania. Headed by its Director, Associate Professor Sue Kilpatrick, it has approximately 45 staff in three locations in the North, South and North West of Tasmania. It has built a strong team of experienced researchers and evaluators drawn from a wide range of disciplines and professional practice areas including nursing, sociology, education and health science. Our team works predominantly with multi-method approaches to research in areas of health service delivery, policy, community engagement in health and the training and education of health professionals. This means that our team is able to apply both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to research problems, as and where appropriate.

UDRH Tasmania's research capacity is further enhanced by its membership of a national consortium of eleven UDRHs which form the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN - <http://www.arhen.org.au/>).

The UDRH has completed research and evaluation projects in a wide range of areas including:

- Rural and inter-professional health education
- Mental Health
- Volunteering
- Chronic disease and chronic disease self-management
- Medication management
- Rural midwifery
- Falls prevention
- Family and community capacity building
- Leadership and partnerships
- Social capital
- Rural emergency response infrastructure
- Rural preceptor preparation

The UDRH has a project quality and progress monitoring system that includes peer review at critical stages and employs editorial expertise to assist in report preparation. All projects are benchmarked against agreed performance indicators, developed as appropriate for each project. Project performance is monitored to ensure that its conduct is in accordance with current best practice and is in accordance with agreed timelines and budgets. The UDRH and the University of Tasmania has systems for monitoring expenditure to ensure it is within budget and for tracking key contractual and reporting dates.

The UDRH can provide associated training to facilitate the uptake of research findings.

## UDRH Resources

The UDRH, along with the University of Tasmania, has a comprehensive research infrastructure including a computer network, research software and library facilities at its disposal, as well as a number of internal staff with specific IT, web design, and instructional design qualifications and/or past experience. Appropriate computer hardware and software for data processing and analysis is available. Library facilities, both the UDRH and those of the University of Tasmania, encompass a comprehensive range of relevant research material including electronic databases and a wide range of academic journals.

## Researchers

### **Erica Bell (Research Fellow)**

Dr Erica Bell is a research fellow in the Hobart office of the University Department of Rural Health. She has a PhD in language theory (semiotics and post-structuralism), and has taught in four different university departments (English, Philosophy, Art, and General Studies). Erica has worked in higher education research at the University of New South Wales and as manager of research and policy development in the Queensland Government education portfolio. In these roles she led many projects involving diverse educators, community and stakeholder groups, producing over forty publications that have helped develop policy and practices in the post-compulsory education sectors. She has been a secretariat member and author of ministerial reviews of education, and was one of two consultants who produced Australia's first national guidelines on assessment quality and equity for the Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities.

Erica is currently chief investigator for a range of multidisciplinary projects, including a Tasmanian project designing a residential rehabilitation service for young people with drug issues, a national project on health sciences education for rural practice, and an international investigation of theoretical frameworks for engaging rural communities in health services delivery. She also has an ongoing interest in research ethics.

### **Kim Boyer (Senior Research Fellow)**

Kim is a former senior health bureaucrat whose work with UDRH focuses in two key areas. The first is in developing multidisciplinary research proposals in the areas of rural health services and in rural health policy development. The initial focus of the position has been on growing old in rural communities, in the impact of rural migration on service delivery and service aspirations and in information management issues and their potential role in health service delivery. Kim's second area of focus is at a national level, as a member of the NHMRC Research Committee, and as chair of the NHMRC's Strategic Research Initiatives Committee, the Health Services Research Working Group and the Palliative Care Research Working Committee. She is also a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Working Committee.

### **Heather Brookes (Research Fellow)**

Since 1993 Heather has worked in both paid and voluntary capacities in the community sector in Tasmania involved as a registered psychologist in service delivery, as well as the development, implementation and management of community projects and services. Recently she joined the Rural Community Engagement team at the University Department of Rural Health Tasmania while concurrently beginning a PhD exploring rural community development. Heather continues to be active in a number community groups and events.

### **Rosalind Bull (Graduate Research Coordinator)**

Dr Rosalind Bull is currently the Deputy Director of the UDRH and coordinates the Rural Health Graduate Research program as part of this portfolio. Her professional background is nursing and nurse education. Rosalind's key interests are rural health; interprofessional education & practice; developing education and support strategies for rural health professionals, and tracing the development of various nursing roles. Her PhD thesis explored the contribution of nurses to the technological world of the operating room and resulted in three international publications reporting findings from the study.

Rosalind has a solid track record for attracting competitive teaching & learning and research grants. She has published in the areas of undergraduate teaching and learning, rural and remote area health care environments, operating room nursing and the clinical nurse specialist role.

### **Rosemary Cane (Junior Research Fellow)**

Dr Rosemary Cane is a dental practitioner who is presently conducting research under an NHMRC Strategic Research Development grant to develop alternate oral health workforce models for providing public adult dental services in Tasmania. She also provides research support for the Partners in Health Oral Health Workforce Education project.

### **Clarissa Cook (Research Fellow)**

Dr Clarissa Cook frequently advises state government employees and health care practitioners on aspects of program evaluation. She has worked extensively with the Project Coordinator on the evaluation of the implementation of the Tasmanian Rural Mental Health Plan (DHHS). This has involved designing the evaluation in consultation with the Implementation Steering Committee, as well as assisting with data analysis and the production of the evaluation report. Other DHHS projects with which she has been involved include: *Collaborating for Improved Health Outcomes* (the MOU between Divisions of General Practice and the DHHS); the consumer consultation process of the *Mental Health Rehabilitation Services project*, and the *Agency Collaboration Strategy for Better Management of People with Complex and Exceptional Need*. In mid 2003 she assisted in the development of a patient satisfaction questionnaire for the Calvary Hospital Readmission Clinics, which subsequently received a Mary Potter Quality Award.

Clarissa delivers research training as part of the *Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development (PHCRED)* initiative. For the past two years she has developed and presented workshops throughout Tasmania on qualitative methods and qualitative analysis. She has also delivered sessions on evaluation design and planning at various meetings and conferences including the GP/Hospital Integration Project workshop, the Tasmanian Rural Mental Health Workers Network Meeting and the Australasia Pacific Extension Network Conference. She is experienced in report writing, has published in peer-reviewed journals, and was awarded a Dean's Commendation Award for her doctoral thesis that examined the impact of social and technological changes on the doctor-patient relationship.

### **Georgina Earles (Supported Researcher)**

Georgina Earles holds the Hobart based 'Supported Researcher' position as part of the PHCRED Researcher Development Program. The position is essentially a year-long 'research apprenticeship', during which Georgie will work with Dr Clarissa Cook (UDRH) and colleagues from Nursing and General Practice at UTas to design and undertake a research project on models of dementia care in rural communities.

Following completion of a Master of International Public Health at the University of Sydney, Georgina worked for the Australian Government Department of Health (DoHA) and Ageing Graduate Program.

Georgie's first 6 months with DoHA were spent working in the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) in the areas of Social Health and Research & Data, with a strong focus

on the provision of services in rural and remote areas. She then undertook a six month placement with the NHMRC, working on the implementation of the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* and the *Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002*. Georgie then returned to OATSIH, where she worked in the Substance Use and Men's Health Section before taking up her position with UDRH.

#### **Shandell Elmer (Junior Research Fellow)**

Shandell is a Registered Nurse and holds an Honours degree in Sociology. She works under the Primary Health Care Research and Development Program (PHCRED) for UDRH and over the past three years has been responsible for the evaluation of the Launceston GP-Hospital Integration Demonstration Site Project. During this time she has been working with practitioners within this site (Launceston General Hospital and community) to increase their capacity to research and evaluate health care integration initiatives

Shandell also has experience in teaching first year nursing students and tutoring Sociology students.

#### **Christine Fahey (Research Fellow)**

Christine is a Research Fellow responsible for providing research and evaluation expertise to support the UDRH. She is involved in supervising, undertaking, and designing research along with grant writing to inform rural health research. She disseminates the results of her research through report writing, journal articles and conference presentations. Christine conducts one and/or half-day workshops on evaluation, community needs' assessment, and team leadership. Christine's research interests include: evaluation; volunteering within the health system; rural health delivery systems research, and rural health workforce support mixed method research. Recently she has conducted research and evaluation in: Volunteering; Falls Prevention, and Midwifery Continuing Education. Her doctoral studies focus on volunteerism.

#### **Martin Harris (Research Fellow)**

As a research fellow Martin has been involved in mental health research since joining the University Department of Rural Health in 1999. His particular focus has been the role of education and training in suicide prevention. He is the Tasmanian representative and Board member for Suicide Prevention Australia. He has completed his M.Ed. (Counselling) studies and is a member of the Australian Board of Certified Counsellors. He is currently completing his Ph.D. where his research topic is 'Resilience in geographically dislocating transitions'. Martin is an accredited trainer in 'Train Small Groups' and has completed a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. Martin has a strong background in education. He is currently the setting examiner for the Tasmanian Certificate of Education Legal Studies pre-tertiary curriculum, a test administrator for the Australian Council for Education Research and a Commissioner for Declarations in Tasmania.

#### **Karen Herne (Research Assistant)**

Karen has a Masters degree in education and is currently providing research support to the team and is involved in the Suicide Prevention Audit.

#### **Sophie Jerrim (Research Assistant)**

Sophie is currently undertaking a Masters in Public Health degree following an undergraduate degree in psychology and provides general research support to the team.

#### **Sue Kilpatrick (Director)**

Dr Sue Kilpatrick is the former Director of the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia at the University of Tasmania. In 2005 she has taken on the position of Director of the University Department of Rural Health. A/Prof Kilpatrick has made significant contributions to the

fields of education and training, economics of education and social capital in rural areas. She has been awarded numerous external competitive research grants and evaluations and other consultancies, valued at over \$3 million, including grants from the National Centre for Vocational Education, Tasmanian Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training, Research, Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation and Agriculture Forestry & Fisheries Australia. A/Prof Kilpatrick has published over 100 reports, books and papers, many in international refereed journals. Her research has influenced policy, e.g. the Tasmanian post-compulsory education strategy and FarmBis, the multi-million dollar joint national and state government training policy initiative for landholders that is now in its third funding cycle. A/Prof Kilpatrick has been a member of reference groups on national projects and initiatives including the Australian Bureau of Statistics development of social capital indicators, the Reference Group for 'Women Living in Regional, Rural and Remote Areas', Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Reference Group for the National Natural Resource Management Statement, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Australia.

Sue Kilpatrick has extensive experience in qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation. She demonstrates expertise in quantitative and qualitative data analysis, including the use of appropriate computer software such as SPSS, SAS, NVIVO and NUD\*IST.

### **Quynh Lê (Lecturer)**

Dr Quynh Lê has worked in different academic disciplines such as Computing, Education, and Rural Health as instructional designer, lecturer and ICT Manager. Her PhD thesis dealt with Web-based courseware development and evaluation. Her research, teaching and work show her ability to work in a range of interwoven issues linking science, humanity and education. This combination strength can be seen in her research publications (over 20 items) such as 'Intercultural health metaphors', 'Where does the Superhighway lead us?', and 'Rural health and information technology: a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective'. She was Manager of major research conferences including *International Conference on Mathematics, Science and Technology in Education (1997)*. She is currently a Co-Editor of the on-line research Journal *Language, Society and Culture*.

Her teaching and research expertise includes courseware development, on-line teaching and learning, web development, database design and development, computer assisted learning, quantitative research methodology and statistics, particularly using SPSS in data analysis

Her current research includes the Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) Project (data collection design and analysis), and Health Information Collection Models, Policy and Practice in Australia.

### **Dorothy McCartney (Junior Research Fellow)**

Originally trained as a zoologist, Dorothy has a Graduate Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics and a Masters degree in Sociology. She has worked as a rural and a project dietician on a number of community centred projects developing her skills in community consultation, training and evaluation. She has published widely. Dorothy is at present working on a project to evaluate the sustainability of a chronic disease self-management project

### **Peter Orpin (Senior Research Fellow)**

Dr Peter Orpin is Program Manager, Research and Evaluation. Peter has worked in both the biomedical and social sciences. After a career as a medical laboratory scientist he moved on to pursue studies in psychology and sociology and completed a PhD in sociology at the University of Tasmania in 2001. This broad training has fuelled an interest in research which utilises the best of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. His major areas of interest are in alternate 'bottom-up' approaches to health care and service delivery that centre on, and empower, individuals and their communities. He has an eclectic approach to theory, and methodology,

although much of his work comes out of a community studies and network theory base. His present research work is primarily concerned with the evaluation of service delivery models.

Peter's major research interests at present are the operation of the Multi-Purpose Service model of health care delivery to rural communities and healthy ageing, particularly management and self-management of chronic disease.

Peter has presented extensively at conferences on evaluation and chronic disease self-management. He is a member of the Australasian Evaluation Society and the Association for Qualitative Research.

### **Jo Osborne (PHCRED Coordinator)**

Jo's main field of expertise and publication is in flexible and distance learning and she has worked for many years in curriculum planning and instructional design. Starting as an educator for the health-related professions in England and then Hong Kong, she first came to Tasmania to work on the development of the external studies program for the Post-Registration Degree course in Nursing. Jo has since worked in many discipline areas in Tasmania and the South Pacific region.

Jo currently coordinates the UDRH contribution to the PHCRED program; she also works in academic policy planning and analysis for the Faculty of Health Science.

### **Sue Whetton (Lecturer)**

Sue has a Bachelor of Arts Degree, Graduate Diplomas in both Primary and Continuing Education, a Master of Health Information Systems and is currently studying for her PhD with the School of Sociology, Social Work and Tourism.

Sue was a member of the UDRH evaluation team for the Phase 1 Telehealth Evaluation undertaken for the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services. Her Masters Project was The Diffusion of Innovation: an investigation of the impact of innovation attributes, organisational characteristics and user characteristics on the adoption of health informatics education. Her PhD study is a discourse analysis/case study of the field of health informatics. She has published in conference proceedings and journals. Sue is the primary author of the recently published textbook Health Informatics: a socio-technical perspective (Oxford University Press).

### **Tania Winzenberg (Senior Research Fellow)**

Tania is an academic general practitioner and epidemiologist with a range of publications in musculoskeletal epidemiology. In 2002, Tania was awarded the Dick Butfield Memorial Fellowship for Medical Research. In her role with the UDRH, Tania has been providing training and mentorship in quantitative research and epidemiology to early career medical researchers.

## Selected UDRH Projects

The following is a selection from the wide range of research and evaluation activities at present being undertaken by the team.

### **Graduate Program**

The UDRH has a rapidly expanding graduate research program with the team currently supervising eight Masters and PhD students researching rural health issues including volunteers, community development, community participation in health care, undergraduate rural placement, rural radiographers and resilience. The department is making a particular effort to ease the path into academic research for experienced rural practitioners.

**Graduate Research Coordinator: Dr Rosalind Bull**

### **PHCRED Program**

The UDRH is a fund-holder under the Primary Health Care Research Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) program which is designed to build research capacity among primary health care practitioners. Our 2005 program includes:

**Research Training Workshops:** The UDRH will be offering a series of introductory research workshops aimed at primary health care workers.

**Research Apprenticeships and Mentoring:** One-on-one mentoring and involvement of primary health care workers in UDRH led research programs.

**Research Conference Scholarship:** To be offered late 2005 to support PHC professional(s) attending research related conference(s).

**Key Contact: Ms Jo Osborne – Program Coordinator**

### **Rural Older Persons' study**

This is a collaborative study involving the Rural Clinical School and University Schools of Nursing & Midwifery, Pathology, Economics, Sociology and Social Work and Geography and Environmental Studies. The current phase of the study is a pilot survey of the present and future service needs of older persons in the Cradle-Coast (West and North West) region of Tasmania. This pilot will form the basis for a funding submission to extend the study state-wide in recognition of the problems facing an ageing rural population and those whose responsibility it is to plan for their care.

**Key Contacts: Dr Peter Orpin (UDRH) / Ms Heidi Behrens (Rural Clinical School)**

### **Designing a residential service for adolescents with drug issues**

This project has been undertaken in collaboration with the Salvation Army and has involved national and state-wide consultation processes to develop an innovative new model of residential service delivery for adolescents with drug issues. It is one of a number of such collaborations which are supporting the Salvation Army in their work with rural people.

**Key Contact: Dr Erica Bell**

### **Designing a methodology for scanning health sciences curricula to identify key curriculum elements for preparing students for rural practice**

An inter-faculty collaboration involving seven university departments across three faculties to develop a new methodology for identifying key knowledge and skills relevant to rural practice. This project forms part of a wider UDRH interest in rural workforce issues focusing on undergraduate and professional support strategies aimed increasing the numbers of health professionals practicing in rural areas.

**Key Contact: Dr Erica Bell**

### **Oral Health 'Filling the Gap' Project**

Tasmanian public dental services, in common with many of the other health professions in the state, face serious workforce supply issues. The 'Filling the Gap' project is funded under the NHMRC Strategic Research Development program to examine innovative models for improving accessibility and equity in rural public dental services in Tasmania. This project reflects wider interests and activities around 'workforce multipliers' as alternative strategies for addressing health workforce problems.

**Key Contact: Dr Rosemary Cane.**

### **The impact of GPs' understanding of dementia on the diagnostic process**

This project involves a collaboration between UDRH, the School of Nursing & Midwifery and the Discipline of General Practice undertaken as part of the Australian Government's Researcher Development Program to supervise 'Supported Researcher' Miss Georgina Earles.

**Key Contact: Dr Clarissa Cook.**

### **Suicide Prevention Program Audit**

The UDRH has been contracted by the state Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to conduct a state-wide audit of suicide prevention programs. The scope of the project is wide, and is based on the inclusion of prevention and early intervention (ie 'wellness' initiatives) as well as crisis intervention and post-vention, in accordance with the LIFE framework. Selected data collected during the audit will be eventually publicly available via the DHHS online Service Directory.

**Key Contact: Dr Clarissa Cook**

### **The rural and regional ambulance paramedic: moving beyond emergency response project**

A collaborative project involving UDRH, Charles Sturt University and Monash University along with the Convention of Ambulance Authorities. It aims to explore the emerging roles for paramedics in regional and rural areas of Australia through four case studies.

**Key Contact: Ms Christine Fahey**

### **Evaluation of the Cancer Council Tasmania's Helpline and Cancer Connect programs**

Wherever practical the UDRH seeks to incorporate a capacity building approach into the work they do with, and for, stakeholder organizations and communities. We recognize the immense value to these groups of being able to conduct their own research and to evaluate their programs. The above projects are a good example of such an approach. UDRH are working the Cancer Council Tasmania, an NGO, to evaluate two of their core programs. Rather than conduct the evaluation for the organization we are working with staff to assist them to design and conduct their own evaluation. This will mean that in the future, the organization will have the skills and capacity to make evaluation part of all of their ongoing activities.

**Key Contact: Ms Christine Fahey**

### **Multi-Purpose Service Boards/Committees**

The UDRH has initiated a research project to undertake a national survey of MPS boards/committees to examine their roles and support and training needs. Community boards or committees are an integral part of the structure of the MPS model; however, little attention has been paid to the demands of the role on largely untrained community volunteers on these bodies. This study aims to fill this gap.

**Key Contact: Dr Peter Orpin**

### **Leading Practice Support Program (LPSP) For Multipurpose Services**

The UDRH works closely with rural health centres across the state to find innovative ways to deliver health care. The LPSP is a collaborative project involving the UDRH, the Upper Murray Community Health Service (Victoria), the Campbell Town Health and Community Service and the University of Melbourne to examine models to increase community participation in health services. The two universities have produced a literature review and will report on the learning outcomes of the project.

**Key Contact: Dr Peter Orpin**

### **Trialing 'Social Norms' Strategies for Minimising Alcohol-Related Harm among Rural Youth**

Drug and alcohol misuse among youth are recognized as major and quite intractable problems in many rural areas. The UDRH has joined with the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies and Tasmania Police to submit a funding application to the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation to run the first Australian trial of a 'Social Norms' approach to substance abuse prevention. This significant application has been successful and will begin in the second part of 2005.

**Key Contact: Dr Clarissa Cook**

## **UDRH Contacts**

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