

Rural & Regional Australia

The case for Parkinson's Specialist Nurse services

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Why this research?

Approximately 28% of Australians live outside cities however, 93% of neurologists are based in major cities resulting in extremely limited access to specialist services for people with Parkinson's in rural and regional areas. Health-related quality of life is worse in these areas, and management of Parkinson's is poorer than that of people in urban areas.

What did we do?

Parkinson's NSW partnered with nursing researchers from Charles Sturt University to build the case for sustainable Parkinson's Specialist Nurse services in rural and regional Australia.

Stage One: Literature Review

Stage one identified 15 evidence-based models with the potential to improve outcomes for people living with Parkinson's. Analysis revealed the essential components for an effective nursing model of practice for people with PD living in rural and regional areas (Figure below).



Key findings:

- Business case for Parkinson's Specialist Nurses must include measures of sustainability, equity of access and cost effectiveness.
- Major outcome measures using a prevalence rate model are direct health system costs, loss of productivity, informal care costs, other financial costs and burden of disease.
- Largest costs: acute care and nursing home costs. Indirect costs: lost productivity.
- Major drivers of increased costs: disease progression, deteriorating motor, cognitive and psychological capacity.
- Nurse-led management strategies minimising the impact of disease progression and maximising QoL will contain acute and residential care costs.

Stage Two: A two-site case study

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2 sites with participants from each of the 3 groups below



Consumers and carers at both sites were unanimous in describing the positive impact of the Parkinson's Specialist Nurse position.

In Coffs Harbour, the location of the Parkinson's Specialist Nurse position enables working both as an integral member of a multidisciplinary team of health professionals and across the continuum of care – acute (ED, inpatient and outpatient), community and residential aged care.

In contrast, the Shoalhaven Parkinson's Specialist Nurse position has been nominally linked with the Primary Health Network (PHN). The PHN provides a shared office space from which the nurse works. No administrative support or formal links with other services are in place.

Key Findings

For a Parkinson's Specialist Nurse to be effective:

- The position must be embedded in the public health system
 - ~ Enables flexibility to work across health care settings and engage with community support organisations such as Parkinson's NSW.
 - ~ Supports the people living with Parkinson's across the disease continuum.
- Role requires specialist-level nursing skills
 - ~ Master's level qualifications, experience in neurological nursing and engagement with professional organisations.
 - ~ Clinical experience enabling provision of direct, comprehensive care.
 - ~ Advanced interpersonal and education skills.
 - ~ Professional leadership skills.
 - ~ Research competence.
- Must ensure sustainability of funding for Parkinson's Specialist Nurses in rural and regional areas

Conclusion

These research findings have relevance to both the wider Australian context and countries with similar geographical challenges. Parkinson's NSW is using these findings to advocate for the implementation of specialist Parkinson's nurse positions in underserved rural and regional locations.

References

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