Workforce preferences for therapists working in rural and remote areas of Australia

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Outline

› Introduction
  - What is the problem?
  - Why do we need this study?
  - What was our goal?
› Methodology
› Results
› Potential implications
Introduction - What is the problem?

› Workforce

- Uneven distribution of the therapists (physiotherapists, occupational therapist, speech pathologists and psychologists) in rural areas.
- Availability of positions

› Therapy services

- Increase demand under the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Limited access to therapy in rural areas
Introduction - Why do we need this study?

We know

› The factors that keep therapists working in rural and remote areas
  - Individual
  - Work related
  - All descriptive studies

› We don’t know
  - Therapists working with people with disabilities
  - What people are willing to trade (more about this later)
Introduction - What was our goal?

Aim:
› To determine the relative importance that rural therapists place on different work characteristics and the trade-offs they are willing to make between them.

Research Question:
› What are the most important determinants for therapist appraising the possibility of working and living in rural Australia?
› What would keep you working in a rural area?
Methodology - Setting (Western Region of NSW)

Western Region NSW
72% of NSW with 9% of the state’s population.
Methodology - Survey

- Design based on what people told us
- 89 questions divided in 6 sections
- Online
- Several distribution channels
- Three month recruitment period
Discrete Choice Experiment: Want to buy a puppy?

Factors/attributes

Breed
Dog breeder
Size
Price
Care Needed
Personality
Life Span

Images from: wallgood.com
Keeping you in a rural area (Factors or attributes)

Factors/attributes

• Travel: spending less nights away from home
• Flexibility: having flexible work choices
• Professional support: being supported by managers and other therapists
• Professional development: having good opportunities for training
• Remuneration
• Autonomy: being able to decide how you work

### Methods - DCE Attributes and Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute name</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Glossary definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>One or less nights away per month</td>
<td>That requires overnight stays away from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two or three nights away per month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four or more nights away per month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Little or no flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>Ability to negotiate your hours of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some flexibility in work hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very flexible work hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional support</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Professional specific advice and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Readily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Opportunity to undertake formal professional development activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remuneration</td>
<td>5% above your current salary</td>
<td>Rural salary loading above current salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10% above your current salary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15% above your current salary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy of practice</td>
<td>Limited capacity for independent professional decision making</td>
<td>Freedom to use professional judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some level of independent professional decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High level of independent decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Well established statistical methods - **DCE Experimental design** 3 alternatives, 6 attributes with 3 levels and 3 blocks of seven choice sets
## Methods - DCE Choice Task Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>Job A</th>
<th>Job B</th>
<th>Job C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel arrangements (Nights away per month)</td>
<td>Four or more (4 or +)</td>
<td>Two or three (2 or 3)</td>
<td>One or less (1 or -)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional support</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Readily</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to professional development</td>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remuneration (Rural salary loading above your current salary)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy of practice (Level of independent professional decision making)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*EXAMPLE - Choose one option per question:*

- Of these jobs, which one would MOST likely keep you practising in a rural area? (Job A)
- Of these jobs, which one would LEAST likely keep you practising in a rural area? (Job C)
Therapist survey overview

- 429 surveys distributed
- 53% response rate
- 226 returned
  - 12 incomplete surveys
  - 8 opted out
  - 7 did not meet inclusion criteria
- 199 full analysis
- 165 completed the DCE
Results – Who are they? (N=165)

Gender

- Female: 93.9%
- Male: 6.1%

Marital status

- Married or de facto: 68.5%
- Single: 26.1%
- Widowed: 1.2%
- Divorced or separated: 4.2%

Allied health profession (%)

- Occupational therapist: 46.7%
- Speech pathologist: 24.2%
- Physiotherapist: 14.5%
- Psychologist: 9.1%
- Therapy assistant: 5.5%

Employment status

- Full time: 57.0%
- Part time: 41.8%
- Other: 1.2%
What would the ideal job look for a therapist working in western NSW?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Preferred Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>1 or less nights away per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Adequate - ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Support</td>
<td>Readily available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible work practices</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least</td>
<td>Remuneration</td>
<td>15% loading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Therapists prefer to have: high autonomy, travel one or less nights away per month, adequate professional development, readily available professional support, very flexible work practices.

- Their preferences vary a lot amongst respondents for “flexibility”. 
What can we do with this information? – Retention Policies

› Monetary incentives do not appear to work.

› Instead:

1. Allowing therapists to able to decide how they work with their clients
2. Limit the number of nights away from home
3. Provide good opportunities for training
4. Provide professional support

Needs further exploration

› Having flexible work choices (what we meant by flexible could have been problematic)
Wobbly Hub Team

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- Website: http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/research/wobbly-hub
- http://twitter.com/WobblyHub
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Wobbly Hub & Double Spokes Project
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Website: http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/research/wobbly-hub
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