CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Development of a framework to promote rural health workforce capability through digital solutions: A qualitative study of user perspectives.

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Introduction: A global reality is that rural health services, and the workforces that provide those services, are under unprecedented pressure. It is posited that improving a rural health practitioners' capability could help to retain them working rurally for longer. With rapidly increasing access to, and use of, digital technology worldwide, there are new opportunities to build capability and leverage personal and professional support for those who are working rurally.

Aims, Objectives, Theory or Methods: Our aim was to understand the factors that make up a health professionals' capability and the motivations or cues to act to build or maintain their capability. In 2021, semi-structured interviews were conducted in rural Australia with General Practitioners and allied health professionals. These were themed and mapped to the Health Information Technology Acceptance Model. It explains how factors (such as health status and beliefs, subjective norms, technology reliability and self-efficacy) influence interactions with health information technology, such as apps, to form behavioural intention in health consumers.

Highlights or Results or Key Findings: Whilst it could be assumed that low technology literacy would act as a barrier to the use of digital tools, the study demonstrated that this was not a significant factor in impeding participants' willingness to adopt digital tools when social and professional networks weren't available face to face to address their capability challenges. The findings provide insight into the concept of health workforce capability, important considerations when designing capability support and key features of health apps or digital tools to support the capability of the rural health workforce.

Conclusions: Personal health and wellbeing, clinical confidence and competence, ongoing education and training, values and beliefs, extended social networks, commitment to, and connection with, community were important aspects of capability. A notable conclusion is the awareness of the potential of digital apps as a self-management tool when rural circumstances prevented other forms of support for rurally practising health professionals.

Implications for applicability/transferability, sustainability, and limitations: Understanding the factors that make up a health professionals' capability and the motivations or cues to act to build or maintain their capability may have a positive effect on their retention in a rural location.