

Australian Radiation Therapy Advanced Practice: A Focus Group Study

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Background

- Advanced practice for Australian radiographers and radiation therapists limited and inconsistent¹⁻⁴
- Workforce redesign in health care necessary⁵⁻⁹
- Challenges predicted in providing effective cancer care¹⁰⁻¹²
- Professional body: multiple discussion papers and framework¹³⁻¹⁶
- Universities: curriculum framework to support training¹⁷
- International exemplars^{18,19}

Why is it not happening?

Research Project

- Aim:
 - The influencing factors shaping the implementation and practise of radiation therapy advanced practice (RTAP) in Australia
- Methods:
 - Qualitative research, constructivist grounded theory methodology²⁰⁻²⁴
 - Stage 1: National focus groups with Radiation Therapists (RT), Radiation Oncologists (RO) and Medical Physicists (MP)
 - Stage 2: Case study investigation from selected radiation oncology centres in Australia

Research Methods

- Stage One: Online Focus Groups
 - Nationally representative participants: RT; RO; ROMP²⁵
 - Focus Groups: meaning generated through group discussion, explore knowledge in a given cultural context²⁶⁻²⁸
 - Online Focus Group: facilitates dispersed access^{29,30}
 - Intent: baseline understanding, minimise researcher bias
- Ethics approved: July 2015
- Recruitment: July-Aug 2015
- Focus Groups: Aug-Sept 2015
- Fourteen participants, six groups: Represented all professions; private and public; metro and regional; most states

Results: Tentative Categories

- Locally Conceptualising Advanced Practice
 - Concept understood in broad terms, challenge to conceptualise locally
 - Influenced by lack of formal structure; examples; award/job description
→ requires flexibility and creativity
 - Requires leaders and RTAP to be on the same page
- Translating Concept into Practice
 - Once concept understood, requires creating a structure, defining the function, creating a label, and gaining broad support (breaking down cultural barriers)
 - If unable to translate into practice: result is RT unofficially doing the job of the RTAP, performing elements of extended scope without formal recognition → feeling demotivated

Results: Tentative Categories

- Creating a Legitimate Identity
 - Process of RTAP creating identity as role is translated into practice, and sustained over time; new identity from the usual RT
 - Legitimate identity has a label; accepted as self-identity by RTAP; accepted by leaders, peers and broader team
 - Without a legitimate identity, RTAP is *'just the resource person'*
- Exhibiting the Qualities of an Advanced Practitioner
 - Influences translating into practice and creating a legitimate identity
 - Qualities of an RT *'shining above the rest'*; expert practice; leadership; research; higher level than the general RT; flexible

Results: Tentative Process

Influenced by rethinking traditional models; overcoming fear

Locally Conceptualising Advanced Practice

Influenced by having supportive leaders; personal drive of the RTAP; shifting the culture

Translating Concept into Practice

Influenced by exhibiting the qualities of RTAP; gaining cultural acceptance

Creating a Legitimate Identity

Conclusion

- Focus group data indicates conceptual, practical and cultural challenges surround implementation of RTAP
 - Is it just too difficult? How do we move forward?
 - Few centres have implemented RTAP: how have they overcome these challenges?
- Next stage: Case study data from selected sites
 - Five centres, theoretical sampling
 - Interviews; inter-professional observation; document analysis
 - Combined data analysis with focus group data
- Outcome: Better understanding, sharing theory and recommendations
 - inform broader implementation of RTAP in Australia

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