of the existing dental schools have increased their student numbers; and there has been a large increase in the number of dentists coming from overseas. Anecdotal evidence indicates that rural dental practices, which have had trouble attracting dental practitioners in the past, are now receiving cold calls from new graduates looking for work. The problem of the rural undersupply of dentists may be correcting itself.

However, a continuous churn of highly skilled and experienced practitioners being replaced by less experienced ones could result, since practitioners tend to move back to capital cities once they gain some experience. A lack of experienced dentists could lead to rural patients being caught up in a repeat restoration cycle of having teeth filled and later having the same teeth refilled as restorations collapse or more decay occurs. Although ensuring that rural towns have fluoridated water supplies would be the most cost-effective way to reduce the incidence and prevalence of dental caries among rural people and to limit the repeat restoration cycle, enabling rural people to access dental care will decrease the effects of the disease, particularly if treated in its early stages.

Despite an increase in interest among new graduates and overseas-trained dentists in working in rural areas, there is still a great need for specialist dental services, such as oral and maxillofacial surgery, oral medicine specialist care, special needs dentistry, periodontics, endodontics and orthodontics, in rural areas. People in rural areas have high medical and dental needs and require access to experienced health practitioners. One way to provide this and to ensure a continuation of dental care in rural communities is to develop an advanced rural dentist program similar to the rural medical generalist program. The program could cover some procedures of specialist dental practice, some areas of practice outside of dentistry and research into rural oral health, and it could also teach the skills to create stronger links and cooperation between rural health care practitioners.

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