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## Academic recognition, the carrot on the stick? Perspectives of junior doctors on incentivizing rural health

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Recruiting skilled and passionate staff in rural hospitals is a global challenge. Reducing child mortality is one of the millennium development goals and in South Africa the highest mortality rates are seen in rural settings. South Africa makes use of inhospitable, travel and housing allowances as positive incentives to attract staff to rural areas. A compulsory year of community service also provides a constant supply of doctors to rural hospitals. This study explores whether academic recognition and career pathing would attract more junior doctors to rural hospitals. Semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted with junior doctors (n=26). Participants were invited via email and social media. Most junior doctors (n=18) would opt to work in a rural hospital if they received academic support and if time was accredited towards a Diploma in Child Health. Consultant lead outreach, satellite campus status and invitation to academic activities were also considered as attractive incentive. None would choose to be permanently employed in a rural hospital, with 20 participants describing rural health as a stepping stone to specialization. In this study, academic recognition and career pathing has shown to be powerful incentives to attract junior doctors to rural hospitals. Decentralized post-graduate medical education may be a solution to rural staff shortages in the short term. Retention of permanent staff remains a topic for further research.

### Biography

Steve Geo Feris has completed his MBChB from Stellenbosch University in Cape Town and is currently doing a Master's degree in Medical Sciences at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban. He works as a Community Service Medical Officer at Dr Malzio Mpehle Memorial Hospital, a rural district hospital in Eastern Cape. He has a special interest in emergency medicine and presented at the 6th International Conference hosted by the Emergency Medicine Society of South Africa in 2017.

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