Executive summary

This study examines the extent to which the Researcher Development Program (RDP) has impacted on knowledge, attitudes and practice in relation to research and to develop a profile of RDP participants. RDP fellows were invited to complete an on-line survey which looked at issues such as previous research experience, research training and activities during the RDP and time allocated to RDP.

RDP fellows from 25 of the 26 university departments are represented in the survey. The response rate was 42% (105/248). Most participants were female (88%) with 66% aged between 31 and 50 years. Fellows were either based in a university department of general practice (UDGP, 57%) or a university department of rural health (UDRH, 43%). Over two thirds (68%) were health practitioners with most being either GPs or nurses. Prior to starting the RDP, the most common research training was at the undergraduate level (30%) followed by Masters (course work, 22%). However, 30 participants had had no research training. Undertaking research in the workplace as part of a team or alone were the most common research activities (41%, 22% respectively).

As expected the most common objectives for doing an RDP was to improve research skills (86%).

There was much diversity in the amount of time spent working on the RDP fellowship, with the most common (47%) being one day per week for between 20 and 104 weeks. Only 52% of the participants agreed/strongly agreed that this was adequate time to complete the RDP work.

Activities undertaken during the RDP were varied, ranging from literature reviews, developing a research question, ethics submissions, attending conferences and seminars, presenting at these events, preparing papers and reports, and submitting grant applications.

Most (94%) agreed/strongly agreed that the RDP was a valuable experience with outcomes including presentations, publications, and changes in clinical practice. Most (82%) also agreed that the RDP had helped them move from a novice researcher to become a more experienced researcher. Indeed, 89% expressed interest in undertaking further research in the future. The impact this has had on their career mainly included an increased enthusiasm in keeping up with research in their field (77%), and maintaining contact with the network of researchers (63%).

Most (84%) agreed/strongly agreed that they had received adequate support from their supervisor and had also developed supportive relationships with other researchers (84%). Participants also found that their RDP made their regular work more evidence based both during (68%) and following their RDP fellowship (54%).

These results indicate that this program has had a positive impact on the RDP fellows in terms of their knowledge about research, their attitude to research, and the way they use research in their work.