An exploratory study of medication supply and management in a rural community in Queensland

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Objective
This research explored issues with medication supply and management in a rural Queensland community, specifically: (1) the roles of rural healthcare providers in the medication pathway, (2) challenges facing these providers in provision of medication services, and (3) the community’s medication-related needs.

Methods
A geographical mapping exercise enabled identification of a rural study community in Queensland, Australia. Interviews with 12 stakeholders external to this community informed the research topics based on the above objectives. These topics were then explored in interviews with 49 healthcare providers within the study community. Perspectives of local consumers (n = 69) were also sought regarding access to medication services.

Results
Thematically analysed interview data revealed general support for extended prescribing and medication supply/administration roles to improve access to medications. Healthcare providers and consumers reported difficulties in continuing medication therapy and reliance on hospital services for medical care and medication supply when primary care services were unavailable. Challenges impacting optimal medication management include ineffective medication information transfer between health service providers and inadequate medication support systems. Further exploration revealed potential models for rural pharmacists’ increased involvement in the medication cycle, which is currently restricted by workforce capacity, prioritisation of dispensing tasks, and lack of remuneration pathway to support extended medication roles.

Conclusions
There is potential for pharmacists to better support the medication cycle and enhance medication management in rural areas. Models worthy of further exploration, to address the shortcomings, include tele-pharmacy, outreach services, sessional employment, and role extension for pharmacy support staff in rural areas.