The Australian government is committed to confirming that all Australians continue to have access to more high quality health services and identifies that nurses and other health professionals are essential to Australian health care system (Harrison, 2007). The Government recognizes that there is a big shortage of nurses and allied health professionals in some parts of Australia especially in rural and remote areas (Harrison, 2007). Australian rural residents suffer less quality health care because of the acknowledged scarcity of the health and medical workforce. There are several reasons for workforce shortage in rural Australia. Health care settings in rural area are resource constrained mainly in terms of both employees and equipment. Lack of facilities,over work load and failure to follow the policies and procedures are main reasons for staff shortage in rural and remote areas. Workforce shortage has a great impact on the nurses working in the rural areas in terms of personal and professional life due to infrastructural constrains and burden of work load on nurses (Mohale , Mulaudzi & Litt 2008). Because of heavy workloads and lack of health professional, nurses have the poor performances and it may lead to legal and ethical issues. It is impossible for the nurses to meet the standards of ethics for the professional practice with a work force shortage. So the government, employees and employers have a major role to find solutions for the workforce shortage in rural Australia andto get better quality health outcome from the rural population. This essay illustrates the rural workforce shortage, causes of workforce shortage in rural Australia, its impact on nurses, legal and ethical issues, and solutions from the government, employers and employees for solving the workforce shortages in rural settings.

There are several reasons for staff shortage in Australia.In Australia, approximately 54000 RN under 35 years of age and virtually 110,000 RN over 45 years of age (AIHW, 2009). In each and every year a huge proportion of well qualified nurses are retired from the Australian health profession and there is large loss of experienced staff from the whole health care system (Becker, McCutcheon & Hegney, 2009). As a result of this, Australian health care system facing a severe staff shortage of nurses. Furthermore working conditions in the rural and remote area is an important reason for staff shortage in rural Australia. The demand on the nurses working in rural areas are diverse and multiple. In rural primary care settings one registered nurse is positioned on duty with only a nursing assistant and there is no physician at the clinics (Devine, 2006). During the day or night shifts a single qualified registered nurses manage whole primary health care facility. This gives to excessively heavy workload and the poor performance of the nurse. Apart from this salary compression is a major problem in rural settings. Studies shows that sufficient salary they received, but the part of salary they spent on work related items, such as phone calls to ambulance, also some nurses says that lack of uniform to wear every day on duty to an inadequate uniform allowance . And they buy their own uniforms with their salaries. Then working in rural areas makes it difficult for nurse’s spouses to supplement their families’ income. So all these reasons nurses does not like to work in rural regions, they wish to stay in the urban areas. As a result of this, there is a large number staff shortage in rural areas. Thework force shortage in rural area may lead to heavy workloads for the health professionals including nurses working in rural health settings.(Mohale et al., 2008)

Rural work force shortage issues have a great impact on nurses in different ways such as psychologically, physically, mentally and emotionally. In psychologically workforce shortage affects nurse’s family relationships. Because of heavy workload they cannot concentrate their child care and household works. Finally the nurses separate from their families for a long period of time and it could negatively affect nurse’s marriages and their relationship with their children (Halcomb, Davidson & Patterson, 2007).Also nurses are not getting enough sleep due to patient load, job stress, length of shifts and professional autonomy. It wills leads to health related problems for the nurses. Mentally, stress is a major problem in nurses who working in rural regions. Stress is due to the heavy work load and staff shortage, shift work, and insecurity about treatment (Lim, Bogossian & Ahern, 2010). Furthermore, low staff ratios, increasing population, failure to maintain the aseptic techniques and inadequate supply of drugs leads to an increase in the exploitation of personal with less skills and a decline in the quality of care offered (Jones, Humphreys & Wilson, 2005). Then, due to workforce shortage nurses experienced emotions such as anger, sadness and fear. Sometimes they feel frustrated and hopeless. For example the nurses are doing the 24hours shift; they are doing from 07:00 to 19:00 and being on call from 19:00 to 07:00 is strenuous. But the patients are not understood they are on call dealt with emergency only. And the patients are not ready to stand in long queues and sometimes they shouted to the nurses. These types of experiences negatively affects for the nurses (Mohale et al., 2008). Furthermore lack of human resources can impose an additional burden on nurses, thus contributing to anger and which leads to staff turnover. Then the infrastructure constrains also make a negative impact on nurses including lack of basic requirements such as accommodation, transportation, communication systems, water and electricity, all these things affect the provision of quality care (Peterson, Northeast, Jackson& Fitzmaurice, 2007). Overall the nurses never get a job satisfaction from their job and as a result of this many nurses decided to leave the nursing profession and finally they become jobless.

Moreover, nurse’s faces a lot of legal and ethical issues in their practice due to staff shortages. According to the ANMC (Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council) each and every nurse has to follow the code of professional conduct.It is very difficult for the nurses to follow the ethical principles in rural settings because of inadequate staffing pattern. Insufficient staffing pattern negatively affect the ability of nurse to follow professional standards that may affect the carrier status of the nurse. Understaffing and other systematic barriers will hinder the nurse’s responsibility of protecting patient’s rights and confidentiality which is a breach of code of ethics and it is a legal issue as well. Also the nurse cannot follow the aseptic techniques due to lack of resources in the rural settings. According to Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) nurses always practice in a safe and competent manner and they have to practice as per the standards of nursing profession and broader health care system (ANMC, 2008). But in the case of rural nurses, doing the professional misconduct and it will directly affect their carrier. Furthermore professional misconduct harm to the client and it is a criminal offence (Staunton & Chiarella, 2008). Besides; government and other responsible organization also face lot of legal and ethical issues due to the workforce shortage in the county sides. Staff workforce shortage directly affects the health of rural population. It will leads to increased mortality rate, adverse events after surgery, increased incidence of violence against staff, rise the patient injuries and increase the accident rates, rise the number of disease rates and increase the communicable disease (Buchan & Aiken, 2008).Finally it will become a global issue among the country. So the government and authorities have to find solutions for the work force shortage in rural Australia.

It is necessary to solving the workforce shortage issues in the health care system in order to maintain the good quality treatment and to improve the safety of client in the rural health care system. For that the government, employers and employees have an unavoidable role to solving these problems in the rural regions in the Australia. Initially the Australian government takes the responsibility to address the work force shortage and to reduce the impact on nurses by implementing several nursing funds and scholarships programs based on the rural regions (Harrison, 2007). For that, the Australian government introduced variety of funding programs to solve rural health work force shortage in Australia. The government funds a number of nursing and associated scholarships in aged care and rural and remote areas where the shortages are most acute. The main program is Nurse Scholarship Program, it contain mainly three schemes such as Rural and Remote Undergraduate Scheme, Continuing Professional Education Scheme and National Nurse Re-entry Scheme (Harrison, 2007).The main aim of these schemes is to supporting the students from the rural background and it will improve future recruitment and retention of nursing and other health professionals in rural and remote areas. Another program is Aged Care Nursing Scholarship; the main aim is to improve the skills of nurses already working in the aged care sector especially in rural and regional areas. Then Allied Health, this fund is to assist students to commence study in allied health discipline. It contains mainly two schemes such as Rural Allied Health Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme and The Australian Rural and Remote Health Professional Scholarships Scheme. These schemes provide scholarships to practicing rural and remote health professionals to access continuing professional developmental opportunities (Harrison, 2007).

Apart from this, The University Department of Rural Health network has a multi-disciplinary attention and provides medical, nursing and paramedical students opportunities to practice clinical skills in a rural health environment.This network also supports those health professionals who are presently practicing in rural regions by providing education and infrastructure, training and support also promoting research for health issues existing in rural and remote areas. (Harrison, 2007)

Moreover, the employers also have a major role to solve the issues related to workforce shortage in the rural area.Lack of human resources are major problem in rural settings (Nankervis, Kenny & Bish, 2008). So the managers who have responsibility to solve the workforce issues by assist with fulfilling the gap in available human resources. And they can introduce night duties in place of a call system. Also they have to arrange the flexible schedule in order to meet the needs of patients and attract professional nurses who cannot work outdated nursing shift. (Mohale et al., 2008). Apart from this the organizations have to introduce special offers for the nurses to attract rural settings like more salary, accommodation with their family and school facilities for their children (Mohale et al., 2008).

Additionally, the employees can minimize the shortage by effective communication, team work and problem solving. Initially effective communication, the nurse has to report their organization about the staff shortage and resources constrains. Then team work, if any emergency or critical situations the nurse has to call their colleagues for assistance. Finally the nurse has to solve the problems by critical thinking and proper management. Apart from this, a professionally qualified and sincere nurse always ready to work in any kind of situations and settings. They have to take the final decisions to work in the rural settings in any circumstances (Buerhaus, Donelan, Ulrich, Norman, DesRoches & Dittus, 2007).

To conclude, workforce shortage is the major problem in rural Australia and the health care sectors and the rural population suffers poorer quality health care because of this shortage. The major cause of workforce shortage is job shortage, patient load, professional salary versus hourly wages and lack of qualified persons in the health care settings. Apart from this poor water supply, problem with transportation, poor accommodation and lack of communication facilities also become reasons for workforce shortage in rural Australia. This workforce shortage strongly effects on professional nurse who working in the rural settings. It affects their physical and mental health. And it will disturb their Family relationships and sleeping pattern. As a result of staff shortage nurse’s inability to follow the aseptic techniques and they breach the code of ethics. Finally it will leads to legal and ethical issues. Also staff shortage affects the health of the rural population and they struggle with many health issues. Yet, Australian government, employers and employees can easily solve these problems. The government can implement several scholarships programs and conducting educational programs for reducing staff shortage in rural settings. The employer can arrange flexible working environment and meeting the basic needs of their employees. .Employees can also resolve this problem by making them flexible to face the challenges in their nursing practice.

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