Background:
Western Australia has a population of 2.6 million; 10% of the national population dispersed over three of Australia’s landmasses. There is 1 tertiary adult burn unit with 10 beds and 1 tertiary paediatric burns unit with 5 beds, both located in Perth. The majority of burn injured patients have their initial treatment at a health facility other than one of the 2 major burn centres.

Appropriate initial treatment and early referral of a burn injury is critical to reduce complications, prevent surgery and improve long term outcomes. Collaboration with rural hospitals utilizing digital images reduces the challenge for non-burn – trained clinicians to assess and treat both acute and rehabilitative burns.

Network development and telemedicine are an important aspect of rural health care and integral to the appropriate and timely initial and ongoing care of the burn injured patient. Developing such networks helps to decrease the professional isolation of rural clinicians, along with the associated costs of patients travelling to Perth.

Burn wound care is well suited to digital imaging as the visual assessment of a burn is paramount for accurate assessment of depth and size. This service, now embedded in the Burn Service WA Model of Care plays an important role in the burn care of rural/remote communities.

A Telehealth digital photo review clinic aims to provide a single point of contact at the Adult State Burn Service and improve equitable access to specialised burn care. The Clinical Nurse Consultant led, online triage of photos using email, facilitates appropriate transfers, prevents unnecessary transfers and the associated personal, emotional and financial costs. It also supports early discharge back to local care providers.

Method:
Digital photos are emailed with the patient’s consent to a designated address.

An automatic reply generates a referral form, contact information and burn wound triage guidelines. It also asks the photo to be uploaded into an email account and includes details for referral process and includes triage guidelines. It also asks the photo to be uploaded into an email account and includes details for referral process and includes triage guidelines.

Testimonials:
- The photo and photo consultation service provided by Fiona Stanley-Burns Clinical Nurse Consultant is an invaluable resource for clinicians working in rural areas of Western Australia. Missing the ability to photograph wound areas and discuss their management plans, without adequate access to a specialist, is a great challenge for many. Accessing this service has enabled us to reduce travel time and cost, and has provided a better level of care to our rural patients. The ongoing working relationship I have developed with the Burns CNC has facilitated clearer communication and smoother transfer and discharge planning for country patients and I now feel confident in our work together.

- Wes (Acting Clinical Nurse Ambulance at Nickol Bay Hospital)

- The Burns Episode of Care Telehealth Photo Review service is a tremendous asset to remote communities. It’s allowed us to have quick access to a Burns Clinical Nurse Consultant with having an extremely valuable resource. The service is run from a rural hospital and has been a key component of our Burns care. We are very grateful for the ongoing support and advice we receive from the Burns CNC.

- Dr Nickol Bay

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Conclusions:
The use of telehealth and digital imagery improves quality and individualised care of burn injured rural/regional/remote Western Australians, while offering opportunities to reduce the length of stay and avoid unnecessary transfers. This process improves the knowledge of rural/remote health care professionals, building better relationships with the local communities. It reduces the need to separate families and reduces disruption to aboriginal communities. It reduces the need to separate families and reduces disruption to aboriginal communities. It reduces the need to separate families and reduces disruption to aboriginal communities.