

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**12 May 2009**

## **Mount Beauty GP honoured**

The 2009 Victorian Rural Doctors' Awards acknowledged Mount Beauty GP Dr Peter Brown for his commitment to the region, at a ceremony in Melbourne on the weekend.

Dr Brown received an award for his Outstanding Contribution to Rural Communities.

Victorian rural doctors were nominated by their peers, patients and local community members in three categories, 35 Years Service to Rural Communities, for *Outstanding Contribution to Rural Communities* or as a *New Rural Doctor*.

Health Minister, Hon. Daniel Andrews presented the doctors and their families with the awards in front of 225 guests at a gala dinner.

Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) chief executive Claire Austin explains the Awards' significance.

"The Awards provide an opportunity to pause and reflect on the contributions that our doctors and their families make to Victoria.

"Additionally, the Awards offer Victorians a way of saying 'thanks' to a corner stone of the population that sustain local communities in so many ways," Ms Austin said.

The 2009 Award recipients were from all corners of the state including, Ballarat, Sale, St Leonards, Moe, Elmore, Lorne, Ouyen, Traralgon, Beechworth, Wangaratta, Portland, Lakes Entrance, Benalla, Phillip Island, Traralgon and Camperdown.

RWAV chairman Dr Philip Webster also paid tribute to this year's recipients.

"As is the nature of general practice and medicine these contributions have been diverse and broad ranging.

"Amongst all the recipients honoured, the common thread was doctors sustaining their local community," Dr Webster said.

An awards panel comprising RWAV, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Australian College of Rural & Remote Medicine, Rural Doctors Association of Victoria Australian Medical Association Vic and Rural Medical Family Network representatives assessed nominees against the criteria for each of the categories.

The Awards were proudly sponsored by Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA), a statutory body established to provide risk management consultancy, insurance and site risk surveys to Victorian State Government departments and agencies.

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**Media – for interviews and high resolution images contact:**

Samantha Marnell: 0439 551 720

RWAV media & communications coordinator

## **Background information**

### **Dr Peter Brown, Mount Beauty – Outstanding Contribution to Rural Communities**

Dr Peter Brown has a strong commitment to general practice and to the right of every Australian to seek medical assistance and treatment regardless of the depth of one's pocket. June this year will mark 10 years of solo bulk billing practice to the community of Mount Beauty and environs.

Mount Beauty is a very socio-economically deprived area with a high level of unemployment and/or seasonal employment. There is also a large component of elderly residents, including retirees from city areas (all bearing the morbidity factors that come with an ageing population), sole parents, drought affected farmers etc. The need for a bulk billing practice speaks for itself.

Prior setting up practice in Mount Beauty, Peter spent five years in one of the most remote and isolated communities of Arnhem Land, Numbulwar. During his time in Numbulwar, he was nominated and received an Australian Doctor Magazine 'Doctor of the Year' award for 'going the extra mile' to involve himself with the traditional Aboriginal population of >900 people. He was also successful in obtaining a Federal Government grant (with strong assistance from the Top End Division of General Practice) to promote the training of Aboriginal Health Workers in the field of microscopy and parasitology. He was appalled at the degree of morbidity and mortality associated with diarrhoeal disease in Aboriginal people, particularly the young and the elderly. With assistance from a pathologist friend who lent him a microscope, and a 'crash course' in parasitology with a leading parasitologist from Liverpool Hospital for Infectious Diseases, he set about training the Health Workers with whom he worked in Numbulwar, in the identification of parasites. This effectively facilitated early treatment and resulted in a huge reduction of the need for hospitalisation due to diarrhoeal disease. He also identified the vast incidence of Streptococcal infection (Beta Haemolytic Strep. Group B) known to cause Rheumatic Heart Disease and post strep Glomerulonephritis. Both diseases rampant in Aboriginal people when compared to caucasian Australians. Sadly, the project to train Aboriginal Health Workers in other NT communities (undertaken in 1998 through all East Arnhem Land communities), failed to gain on-going support.

He is much loved and respected by his large number of patients. Peter also worked for 14 months in Antarctica at Davis Station in 1990.

### **About Dr Peter Brown**

"My choice of vocation was influenced by my father, a pharmaceutical rep, and my mother, a Nursing Sister.

“I enlisted in the Army Reserve while studying medicine at the University of Queensland to help make ends meet and accepted an RAAF scholarship at the end of third year, to become financially independent.

“After graduation, I spent my Residency at Rockhampton followed by four interesting years as a RAAF MO. After discharge, I practiced in a group practice in Shepparton for five years. Then, after a stint in Antarctica for 14 months, I came back to Australia and took the position of DMO Groote Eylandt in the NT practicing a wide ranging of Aboriginal Healthcare. It was in Numbulwar that I met a most diligent, capable and caring Bush Nurse, Lorna, who now is my wife.

“Lorna and I spent five great years in Numbulwar together, setting up the first private practice in Arnhemland, practising culturally aware medicine and initiating hands-on research into parasitology.

“We then came to Victoria. Our practice is based on the principles of scientific, evidence-based medicine delivered to our patients without regard to their social or financial status. No one has to ask for “charity”, and everyone is treated equally. We encourage medical students to come to our practice for their electives, to experience and participate in the provision of medical care to the broad spectrum of our rural community, in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual respect.

“I greet and chat to my patients where ever we meet. It often ends up in a bit of friendly banter and the compulsory doctor joke. This, I am sure, helps establish a rapport, which in turn results in trust and, hopefully, better outcomes in health,” Dr Brown said.

**About RWAV** – Rural Workforce Agency Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation working with communities that have underserved health needs. We do this through a number of initiatives that recruit, support and advocate for the health workforce throughout rural and regional Victoria. [rwav.com.au](http://rwav.com.au)