

MEDIA RELEASE

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Portland doctor honoured

The 2009 Victorian Rural Doctors' Awards acknowledged Portland doctor Michael Duke for his commitment to the region, at a ceremony in Melbourne on the weekend.

Dr Duke 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, Trafalgar, Mount Beauty, Beechworth, Wangaratta, 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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Background information

“For a psychiatrist, the combination of time spent in this lovely area, with a fascinating and worthwhile range of people to treat and a supportive professional network makes it a very viable and rewarding option,” Dr Duke said.

“Working in rural areas is not new for my family. My father, also a doctor, worked in provincial Canada with Inuit and First Nations peoples and was also was the Flying Doctor out of Charleville in western Queensland in the late 1950s.

“I have been a psychiatrist for 35 years and, in that time, have enjoyed many roles. From working in general hospitals with medically and surgically ill patients with psychological issues, to family therapy of people with eating disorders, to running a large old psychiatric hospital, to starting and running an aged persons’ psychiatry service, to helping a private psychiatric hospital refresh its programs and image, to being the Chief Medical Officer for a nationwide medicolegal company. More recently, as my working life starts to wind down, I have worked as a medicolegal consultant.

“For the past 12 years, I have worked around much of rural Victoria and regional centres as part of my role with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

“In 2003 I joined RWAV, consulting to the Portland area, helping patients, their families and carers, and the local GPs as well as working with the local Aboriginal people of Heywood, the Gunditjmara, who are the traditional owners of the whole region.

“The work has been its own reward. Nothing is more satisfying to a psychiatrist or any other doctor than to see patients recover. Working in the country means that people who may otherwise lack access to psychiatric services can see someone without total disruption of their lives at a time when they really need help.”

Nomination background information also available.

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