



MEDIA RELEASE

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Community Plays Big Role in Doctor Retention

Community assistance is one of the key factors needed to help overcome the chronic doctor shortage in rural areas of Victoria.

During February 2006, Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria (RWAV) conducted a series of community consultations through rural Victoria to identify the critical medical workforce issues of concern to rural communities. As a result of these consultations, RWAV has compiled a report '*Addressing GP Recruitment and Retention Issues in Rural Victoria: report of Community Consultations. February 2006*,' which shows that doctors and their families need intense community support to help them to stay in rural towns.

Many communities have become aware of the extent of the looming medical workforce crisis despite many GPs working longer hours to cover the gaps in availability. The importance of high-level community involvement to recruitment and retention of doctors was constantly re-iterated as community, local government, doctors and doctors' spouses talked about their experiences. One doctor said that it was the care he received from one family in his town that made all the difference, and meant that he stayed and established his thriving and popular practice.

It is currently estimated that in rural Victoria alone, the shortage is so great that 270 new GPs are required annually until the year 2013 to reach a balance of supply and demand.

The paper outlines proposed solutions and activities that could help meet the challenges and change the face of rural medical services. Some of the suggestions put forward include local government supporting networks of local service and industry groups and volunteers, to help new medical families settle into town, and ideas like the establishment of rural medical schools, more internships in country hospitals and changes to enrolment requirements to improve the participation of rural students in medical courses.

Community support is desperately needed to assist in enabling young doctors to make a reasonable connection with rural life, including friendships, membership of clubs and familiarity with the setting.

The report notes that "overseas trained doctors and families often experience 'cultural disconnect'", which makes community support and acceptance essential to maintaining quality medical staff within the region.

"The capacity to make connections into the community and be accepted as members of the community is important for all new families, but especially for families from overseas," the report says.

Forum participants highlighted the need for the public to recognise the importance of good medical services to the health and well being of communities.

The effects of the medical professional shortage were described as “substantial” with the loss of a doctor having significant flow-on effects to a wide range of community services. According to the report, rural doctors play a pivotal role in ensuring the continued provision of aged care, allied health facilities, hospitals and pharmacies.

RWAV Chief Executive Officer, Dr Jane Greacen, said the consultation process had provided important information that would help with future planning, and she thanked those people who gave their time and came to the meetings.

About RWAV

RWAV was established in 1998 to overcome the shortage of rural doctors and improve access to medical services for rural Victorians. RWAV's recruitment programs and ongoing support services have been fundamental to increasing rural GP numbers in Victoria.

Today, RWAV is addressing workforce shortages in rural and regional towns. Some of its key priorities include the provision of support services for rural doctors and their families, professional development programs, locum support, marketing of rural general practice, recruitment of rural doctors including specialist outreach services, workforce planning and research to inform government policy.

Further information on RWAV is available on the website at www.rwav.com.au

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