



Media Release

22 September 2008

For immediate release

Rural Health on the Agenda for Health Students Across NSW

Students doing their part in easing the rural health workforce shortage

Over 100 medical, nursing and allied health students are coming together for the second 'Rural Appreciation Weekend (RAW)' in Dunedoo, New South Wales from 3-6 October. They will be participating in rural oriented activities to give them an opportunity to understand what it is like to live in rural Australia. These students, the majority of whom are from city backgrounds, are coming together in a multidisciplinary setting to better understand the issues effecting rural and remote Australia. It has been proven that positive experiences in rural or remote areas are more likely to improve the chances of a student working in such areas, and this camping weekend for health students across NSW is designed to get them thinking more about rural health. Medical student and Co-Chair of the National Rural Health Students' Network (NRHSN), Mr Shannon Nott, devised this program last year with the aim to provide city and country health students the opportunity to experience rural lifestyle. He states "We need to start thinking outside the box when it comes to providing equity in terms of healthcare in this country. There needs to be more opportunities for students to experience rural life whilst at university if we are to begin to recruit health professionals out bush. Students learn about rural and remote health in their lectures but nothing can replace the learning curve of experience."

Increasing the numbers of medical, nursing and allied health places is a necessary measure to increase the overall number of health professionals, but does not necessarily translate to an increase in health professionals working in rural areas. The Rural Allied Health and Medical Society (RAHMS) from the University of New South Wales (which is hosting RAW) is hoping that this combined event for all member clubs of the NRHSN, will highlight the need for more inclusive incentives and opportunities to attract young health professionals of all disciplines to rural and remote communities. As Mr Nott says, "Up until recently, most of the incentive schemes, scholarships and opportunities for rural health placements have been geared towards medical students but this will not provide a viable multi-disciplinary health workforce for our future. Students from all health

disciplines need positive experiences in rural and remote communities to encourage them to return.”

The Rural Appreciation Weekend will bring together students from across NSW to network and interact with local health professionals, and local members of the community. Students will also engage in Indigenous cross-cultural workshops, farming culture, be given talks on snake bite first aid and interact in various other activities surrounding the local community. RAHMS President Miss Sophie Rymill says “This weekend is an opportunity for students to learn from each other just as much as they can learn from the professionals and workshop coordinators. It is an invaluable experience for students to come together from across the state to learn more about what rural life entails.”

Up until now, there has been much emphasis on the shortage of doctors in rural and remote areas; however with the Government’s release of the ‘Rural Health Workforce Audit’ in April 2008, it has become more apparent that a much larger issue exists. Mr Nott highlights that “We need thousands more nurses, midwives, Aboriginal health workers, dentists and additional allied health professionals to provide the essential healthcare services in the bush that are currently taken for granted in metropolitan areas. Rural and remote communities are struggling with higher morbidity and mortality rates and inequitable healthcare, with the closest accessible health care services often several hours away.”

The Rural Appreciation Weekend is being held on a sheep, cattle and cropping property outside of Dunedoo NSW. The weekend is aimed predominately at students who are unfamiliar with rural lifestyle and the benefits of rural health practice. It is designed to entice students to begin thinking about futures in rural health careers.

RAHMS is a member club of the NRHSN, which represents 28 Rural Health Clubs with over 7,000 members from universities around Australia. These members are passionate about multi disciplinary rural and remote health and hope to create a future with better health outcomes for all rural and remote Australians.

Visual and Interview Opportunities:

NRHSN Co-Chair and RAW Creator Shannon Nott

RAHMS President Sophie Rymill

Workshop coordinators and guest speakers with interests in rural health including Dr Tilak Dissanayake (RDA NSW and Rural Doctors Network Board of Directors)

Medical, nursing and allied health students from rural health clubs across New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

Where: 1129 “Oakfield” Golden Highway, Dunedoo New South Wales

When: 3-6 October

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