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More general practitioners choose country

The number of general practitioners practising in country Western Australia has increased once more, with a total of 836 known to be working in rural and remote communities at the end of 2014. This is the third year in a row that numbers have increased, with the figure representing an increase of 6.2% compared to the same time in 2013.

The number of GP registrars (trainees) continued its growth from previous years, increasing to 131, or 15.7% of the rural GP workforce, and is the highest figure recorded to date.

“These figures are very positive for rural Western Australia,” Ms Belinda Bailey, the Chief Executive Officer of Rural Health West said, “They demonstrate that attraction and recruitment programs highlighting the benefits of rural practice are starting to bring results. However rural Western Australia remains short of qualified GPs.”

“We need to remain conscious of the need to provide GP registrars with a positive experience, in order to ensure they join the permanent rural general practice workforce,” she said. “It can take up to four years for a GP registrar to complete their training.”

International Medical Graduates continue to make up just over half of the rural general practice workforce (54.7%) in country Western Australia, which also has the highest proportion of solo general practitioners nationally.

“There continues to be a maldistribution of general practitioners between metropolitan and rural areas, and International Medical Graduates play an important role in ensuring our rural communities have access to primary health care services. Rural Health West is aware of the need to support these doctors, and the many doctors who are working in solo practices.”

“Our primary focus is to ensure that all rural communities can have access to quality general practitioner services, and we are working closely with many state and Commonwealth agencies to improve the support provided to all rural health professionals.”

Each year Rural Health West releases an annual General Practice Workforce Analysis Update, which reports on key components of the rural general practice workforce. Number, age and gender, location, turnover and working hours are some of the key components the Update highlights.

Key findings from the 2014 Update include:

- Resident general practitioner numbers increased by 27 compared to 2013
- 58 rural general practices (27.8%) are solo practices
- International Medical Graduates comprise 54.7% of the rural and remote GP workforce
- Females working in rural areas has increased making up 40.1% of the workforce in 2014, the highest recorded figure
- Turnover of the workforce decreased by 1.4% compared to 2013
- 14 doctors joined the permanent workforce from their GP training program, representing 12% of all new arrivals
- GPs employed for less than 1 year decreased by 1% and doctors employed for more than 5 years increased by 1%, with doctors staying longer than 5 years increased to 43%
- The more remote the area that a doctor works in, the more hours they work

A full copy of the report can be downloaded from the Rural Health West website www.ruralhealthwest.com.au/workforcedata.

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As the leading rural health workforce agency for Western Australia, Rural Health West is a not-for-profit organisation funded by the State and Commonwealth Governments responsible for the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled sustainable health workforce to meet the needs to rural and remote Western Australians communities.