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Doctors in race to save 'lives' at Rottnest

The beaches and tourist hotspots on Rottnest Island were the backdrop for a series of medical emergencies over the weekend including a near drowning, a snake bite, a stroke and a potential spinal injury.

Fortunately, they were only simulated emergencies and 30 junior doctors and medical students were on hand to ensure the 'casualties' received the best treatment possible.

For the first time, Rural Health West hosted Rotto Ramble, an 'Amazing Race' style medical wilderness challenge on Rottnest Island to help tomorrow's doctors think 'outside the square' when faced with emergency situations in non-hospital settings.

The unique two-day event saw six teams of junior doctors and medical students performing a range of simulated emergency scenarios around the island as they raced to the finish. Participants didn't know what medical emergency was coming, or when, but they had to be ready to swing into action, work as a team and save 'lives'.

Rotto Ramble creator and emergency medicine specialist Professor Tony Celenza, said the uniqueness of the wilderness event enabled junior doctors and medical students to utilise a wide range of skills. Professor Celenza works at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the University of Western Australia.

"The doctors and medical students responded to medical emergencies that happened without warning at various locations on the island, which for many was out of their comfort zone," Professor Celenza said.

"They're used to having access to medical equipment and monitors in a hospital setting. In these wilderness scenarios they had to improvise and think laterally under pressure as well as work effectively as a team."

The event gave junior doctors and medical students the opportunity to become team leaders and develop their emergency medicine and communication skills, whilst working under the supervision of highly experienced practitioners who have worked in rural and remote regions and have expertise in wilderness medicine training.

Albany Health Campus Resident Medical Officer Dr Emma Smith, who took part in Rotto Ramble, said it was a great way to build confidence in your medical abilities.

"I attended Rotto Ramble for the challenge and definitely recommend it to other junior doctors and med students. It's a chance to put your skills to the test and a fun way to use your medical knowledge," Dr Smith said.

Rotto Ramble is proudly sponsored by

Rural Health West is the only organisation in WA that offers this unique type of practical training event and is a leading education provider of wilderness emergency medicine conferences in Australia. Rural Health West also hosts annual wilderness emergency medicine events in the north and south west of WA.

Rural Health West would like to acknowledge the support of our key sponsor, Rural Doctors' Association of Western Australia Inc. and to stroke scenario sponsors, the Stroke Foundation, for helping to make this unique event possible.

Dr Andrew Kirke from the Rural Doctors Association said Rotto Ramble was a fantastic event.

"It brought young doctors together and challenged them in a variety of clinical scenarios. The enthusiasm and resourcefulness shown over the weekend are just the qualities we are looking for in rural doctors of the future," Dr Kirke said.

Rotto Ramble coincides with the start of National Stroke Week on 12 September 2016 and included a team challenge on Rottnest Island to raise awareness of the signs of stroke among the participants. During National Stroke Week the Stroke Foundation is encouraging everyone to learn the signs of stroke and spread the think FAST and 'Speed Saves' message.

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