



Doctors Service Awards

RURAL HEALTH WEST LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP AWARD

In 2013 Rural Health West is acknowledging a rural general practitioner, who has worked in and for country Western Australia over the last 30 years.

This notable practitioner was exposed to the rural lifestyle at a young age, and right throughout her training, ensured she was able to enjoy country rotations - spending a GP term at a solo country practice and rotations in country hospitals. Her rotation at Port Hedland hospital provided one of her first memorable moments, being a junior doctor in ED after a cyclone passed through and seeing over 60 patients in a day.

She spent 15 years in Geraldton, working at a local general practice and raising a family. The opportunity as a rural doctor to be able to work in and, be involved with the community and have great friends was unique and one that was greatly enjoyed.

In the 1980s she was part of the movement that saw more focus being applied to rural practice. She was an inaugural member of the Rural Doctors Association of Western Australia. She was one of the doctors originally surveyed by Emeritus Professor Max Kamien as part of his research for the "Kamien Report" which resulted in the establishment of WACRRM.

In the early 1990s she worked with WACRRM to connect and engage with rural students wanting to pursue a career in medicine. The establishment of WACRRM also saw greater support for rural doctors attending professional development, and this doctor found this very welcome, as it allowed her to participate in educational courses and have a break from work.

She also became an active member of the newly established Midwest Division of General Practice, being the inaugural Secretary and becoming the Chair in 1997. The division was very active in the Midwest and ran projects in palliative care, diabetes, ADHD and pain management, as well as hosting Friday morning education sessions (previously run by a local GP).

During her time in the Midwest it became apparent that access to education and training for rural doctors, along with good experiences and support, were key deciding factors that impacted on the decision of a doctor to stay and practice in a rural location. This has been a continual influence and a key part of all strategies she has initiated.

In 1999, she made the move to the Perth, like many rural general practitioners, to be close to her children as they entered their final stages of education and other family members. She commenced employment with WACCRM at this stage.

Her initial role, and one she really enjoyed saw her supporting and working closely with medical students through the SPINRPHEX rural health club and GP registrars through the WACRRM Rural Training Program... She also had the opportunity to get to know other rural doctors, in particular the locums and overseas trained doctors, who she orientated and also provided support to. She worked on educational events and participated in the monthly satellite broadcasts - a role that was scary (being in front of the camera) but left her feeling great once completed!

She participated in recruitment trips, both overseas and interstate, and enjoyed the opportunity to be able to describe first hand to these doctors what it was really like working and living in rural Western Australia. In 2003 she stepped into the role as Director of WACRRM and spent the next five years in this role.

Over this time, she is most proud of the enthusiastic and dedicated team she worked with, the implementation of the MSOAP program, the Five Year

Overseas Trained Doctor Scheme and witnessing the improved conditions and support available for rural doctors. The Engaging Rural Doctors Project was a significant highlight, providing the opportunity to once again engage with rural doctors and understand their issues. A Ministerial Review, which resulted in the separation of WACRRM from The University of Western Australia and the establishment of Rural Health West was also overseen by this doctor and her final memorable moment in the role as its Chief Executive Officer was attending her last Annual Conference and Trade Exhibition and receiving a standing ovation from the attending rural general practitioners.

In 2008, she decided to look for opportunities in the public sector that would allow her to influence service delivery and make some real changes on the ground. A role at WA Country Health Service was secured and she has spent the past five years working there.

Highlights have included the development of the Rural Practice Pathway, which now has over 80 junior doctors working in WA country hospitals compared to 23 in 2008, and the development of strong relationships with education providers and the establishment of the Postgraduate Medical Education Unit.

The development and implementation of the Southern Inland Health Initiative was also a key achievement, managing the investment of over half a billion dollars in health infrastructure and human resources. The Southern Inland Health Initiative has resulted in massive changes to the delivery of both primary and secondary health care and allowed for significant investment in Telehealth, with Western Australia being the first state to establish an Emergency Telehealth Service, which is making a big difference to small communities in the Wheatbelt.

She was on the Medical Board of Western Australia for ten years and a foundation Board Member of Health Workforce Australia.

For her contributions to the improvement of rural health both as a general practitioner and health policy maker, Rural Health West would like to acknowledge the commitment of Dr Felicity Jefferies.