Rural Health West hosted over 80 delegates at its Skills by the Sea Conference held in Fremantle on 17 October 2015. Delegates participated in one of six professional development workshops providing clinical updates and hands-on experience. The workshops were designed to give rural doctors relevant knowledge to assist them in country general practices and rural hospitals.

All workshop streams were well attended and included procedural dermatology, palliative care, obstetrics ultrasound, surgical and practical medicine, paediatric and ENT updates and cardiac emergencies. In some streams practical learning was required, such as live ultrasound scanning for third trimester pregnancies, perfecting suturing and stitching techniques and practising plastering skills.

The workshops were facilitated by specialists of their field and general practitioners who gave their time to teach rural doctors new skills and pass on their expertise. Without exception the doctors mentioned how relevant the workshops were to their learning needs and that the standard of education was excellent.

Delegates also had the opportunity to network with colleagues from different practices around the state and liaise with the organisations who exhibited at the conference. Rural Health West acknowledges the support received from exhibitors and the facilitators, and thanks them for their time and attendance. The feedback from rural and remote doctors who attended has been positive and the one-day event was overall a great success.

Rural Health West is hosting its final conference for 2015 in November. The Wilderness Medicine Conference will be held in Margaret River and places for this event are filling quickly.

Enjoyable, informative, well presented at an excellent pace.

2015 Delegate
Welcome to our last issue of Rural Health Matters for the year, and what a busy year it has been!

Rural Health West has recently published its Annual Report which provides you with an overview of the many programs and initiatives that Rural Health West has been involved in throughout the last 12 months.

One of these was the Finding My Place project which has led to great dialogue between the health agencies in Western Australia. Finding My Place provided us all with valuable and important information on what is working and what is not working in relation to the attraction and retention of the rural medical workforce.

Rural Health West has also updated its strategic plan which includes renewed focus on our attraction, recruitment and retention programs.

Over the last two years we have been working hard to raise the profile of rural practice with the future health workforce and we are pleased to see a continued increase in rural GP registrar numbers and strong interest in the vocational experiences we offer.

Once again the Australian General Practice Training program has received a large number of applications and, as you will read in this publication, the Western Australian General Practice Education and Training Limited is looking for more rural general practices to help train the future workforce.

One of the key factors for retention continues to be access to professional development. As the only rural health workforce agency in Western Australia, we see the provision of high quality, accredited CPD workshops as very important. We have managed to increase the number of these to 30 over the last 12 months and are planning to offer these, and new topics over the coming 12 months.

Rural Health West is a not-for-profit agency that is funded to do this work through the State and Australian health departments. We have been working on developing and building relationships to ensure we are able to continue to support rural health practitioners in the years to come. We are pleased to feature the new General Manager for Primary Health Network Country WA and the new State Manager for The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners WA Faculty in this edition.

As this is our last edition for 2015, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all rural health practitioners for the fantastic work they do. I was privileged to travel to many country towns over the past 12 months and meet with many of you. Our rural communities are very well supported by the dedication and commitment you all demonstrate.

Rural Health West is here to help and support you so you can continue to help the communities you live in. If you have any feedback on the programs we provide, please contact us.

Rural Health West Doctors’ Service Awards 2016

NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN

Nominate an outstanding rural doctor for one of five awards

Visit the website for the awards criteria and nomination forms

More health professionals supported to Choose Country

The Rural Health West recruitment team has been providing a free recruitment service for all health professionals since the program was initiated in 2012.

“The funds provided through the Rural Health Professionals Program enable candidates to receive support for removalists; rental payments for the first three months; or to assist with accessing professional development which is often not available outside metropolitan locations,” said Ms Tina Donovan, Rural Health West Recruitment Services Manager.

Last financial year, eight physiotherapists, one social worker and one nurse received financial support provided by this program.

To be eligible, the candidate needs to be relocating to a Remoteness Area (RA) 2 to 5 locations; provide more than 50 per cent primary health service delivery; work a minimum of 0.4 full-time equivalent; and have a contract of a minimum of 12 months.

“This program is greatly appreciated by both the candidate and the practices,” said Ms Donovan. “For the candidate, it makes the relocation and the transition into rural practice a little less daunting and, for the practice, it assists in making rural practice more appealing.”

The Australian Government Department of Health is providing financial support to recruit and retain nurses, midwives, dentists and allied health professionals through the Rural Health Professionals Program.

Recent graduate, physiotherapist Kate FitzSimons, was delighted to be a recipient of the support the program provides.

If your practice is looking to expand to include allied health services; would like to employ a practice nurse; or needs a locum or permanent general practitioner, our recruitment team can assist. Visit the website to register your vacancy online or contact the recruitment team:

E recruit@ruralhealthwest.com.au
T 08 6389 4500

I was very grateful for the assistance received from Rural Health West in helping me find my current role. The support they have provided has been fantastic and I am thoroughly enjoying the experience of working in a rural community.
Dr Stephen Langford joined the Rural Health West Board of Directors in 2009, following his time as a Board member of the Western Australian Centre for Remote and Rural Medicine (WACRRM).

Dr Langford has now completed his maximum time as a Board member and reflects on the changes he has observed and been part of.

Why did you join the Board of WACRRM and then Rural Health West?
I originally sought to join the Board to ensure a strong focus remained on recruitment and retention of medical practitioners for rural areas. Without good doctors, the system withers.

What are some of the achievements you think Rural Health West made over the time you have been on the Board?
Rural Health West is a very professional organisation that undertakes and oversees a broad range of programs. This is a result of establishing a sound financial footing and being well governed. Rural Health West also provides genuine ‘bang for the buck’ for government funders.

The organisation has also developed a strong reputation for providing quality continuing professional development opportunities and having been in existence for 25 years is a great achievement.

What changes and challenges have you observed in the recruitment and retention of rural medical practitioners?
One of the biggest changes, and indeed challenges, facing Rural Health West and the rural medical workforce is one of numbers and training.

Whilst there has been an increase in the number of medical students in recent years, the breadth of experience these graduates can now obtain is more limited than in the past and less procedurally focused. The newer graduates, not unreasonably, are also less inclined to work in isolation and devote seven days a week to their patients.

The challenge going forward is ensuring appropriate training and experience for new graduates so they can confidently provide a broad range of services in rural areas.

Social and professional isolation, education of children and employment opportunities for family members will continue to be issues into the future, as in smaller towns these have not improved. For larger towns, there is a greater number of doctors sharing the load and providing collegiate support that will ensure their survival into the future.

What advice do you have for those considering rural practice?
Take advantage of the terrific opportunities to practise a broad range of clinical medicine and challenge yourself by providing holistic care which can make a real difference to people. Even if you only stay for a short while, you won’t regret the interesting cases and people you meet - if you don’t give it a go, you will never know!
Medical Advisors at Rural Health West

Rural Health West employs a Medical Director and several Medical Advisors who provide clinical guidance and advice across a range of programs.

All our advisors are general practitioners who have experience working in rural communities. They are an invaluable resource that we utilise to ensure rural doctors and practices are receiving the best available information and services in the industry.

As the Medical Advisors have first-hand knowledge of the particular needs and challenges that face rural medical practitioners, many of our programs, including professional development events, are refined in consultation with them.

Rural Health West’s Medical Advisors, Dr Olga Ward, Dr Peter Smith, Dr Scott Teasdale and Medical Director Dr Michael Eaton, are an integral part of the Education Steering Committee.

The remainder of the committee is comprised collectively of representatives from the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, Western Australian General Practice Education and Training Limited, various rural general practitioners, Professor Tony Celenza and members of the Rural Health West Professional Development team.

The committee’s role is to provide clinical guidance and governance towards all Rural Health West continuing professional development events. They ensure presented content is relevant and administers significant, clear clinical education for rural doctors. Some of the advisors also participate in the events as facilitators or trainers, utilising their many years of hands-on experience working in rural communities.

The Medical Advisors also assist in defining the eligibility guidelines for the Rural Locum Relief Program (RLRP) in Western Australia.

The RLRP is an approved workforce program under the Health Insurance Act 1973 which is administered by Rural Health West in Western Australia.

They assess and approve each candidate for placement on the program. The Medical Advisors also approve extensions, review clinical mentor plans and closely follow each doctor’s progress towards Fellowship.

The knowledge and valuable contributions they provide, support Rural Health West in continuing to be the leading workforce agency for health professionals in rural and remote Western Australia.

Pictured from left: medical advisors Dr Olga Ward, Dr Scott Teasdale, Dr Peter Smith and medical director Dr Michael Eaton.
Ms Vicky Moriarty (pictured below) has recently been appointed as the new State Manager for RACGP WA Faculty. The RACGP is a national member organisation with more than 30,000 members across Australia, of which more than 10,000 belong to the National Rural Faculty. Ms Moriarty joined RACGP WA Faculty as State Manager in July 2015, having come from Silver Chain Group, a national community nursing organisation with more than 3,000 employees including doctors. Over the past 10 years, she has worked principally in consulting and human resources management roles in health care. Prior to that, she worked in international education, IT and social services with a strong focus on effective change management.

Passionate about leadership in health care, Ms Moriarty sees general practitioners as being on a journey with patients and working at the heart of our communities, something that is vital to the integrity of rural health. Her strengths lie in understanding the day-to-day challenges of general practice, including staff management and leadership and working to devise practical long-term solutions in a collaborative way.

She is proud to have joined RACGP WA Faculty, whose success lies in its high-quality QI&CPD activities and advocacy for general practice. The WA Faculty offers an expanding range of webinars on key topics pertinent to rural general practitioners including acute mental health as well as practical education such as the ‘Procedures in the practice’ Active Learning Module and the Clinical Emergency Management Program (CEMP).

For the next 12 months, RACGP WA Faculty is busily preparing for the GP16 conference which will be held at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre in September 2016.

GP16 represents a great opportunity for general practitioners from all over Western Australia to engage with their peers from interstate and overseas and showcase what it means to be a general practitioner in unique Western Australia.

More broadly, the faculty’s goal is to build upon that existing offering and increase collaboration with other organisations in pursuit of their members’ needs, which Ms Moriarty sees as a key part of her role alongside working in partnership with the WA Faculty Chair, Dr Tim Koh.

For more information please visit the RACGP website www.racgp.org.au.
In April, the Australian Government appointed WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) to establish and operate the three PHNs in Western Australia – Perth South, Perth North and Country WA.

WAPHA Chair, Dr Richard Choong, said the move to PHNs is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to place primary health care at the heart of the Western Australian health system and create the mechanism for integrating services across organisations and boundaries.

Ms Richardson leads Country WA PHN and oversees regional hubs located in Broome, Karratha, Geraldton, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Albany and Esperance.

Regional Western Australia is no stranger to Ms Richardson who grew up in the Wheatbelt and lived in Three Springs, Dalwallinu, Narembeen and Tammin.

Her connection with regional Western Australia continued in the Pilbara where she worked for eight years establishing the Nintirri Neighbourhood Centre in Tom Price, women’s health service and services for children and young people.

Ms Richardson said her time working in regional Western Australia along with her experience working in Australian, State and local government organisations had given her a strong foundation for her role as Country WA PHN General Manager.

She said general practitioners are essential to effecting sustainable change across the health system and are critical to facilitating patient care pathways.

“This is why embedding general practitioners within the WAPHA corporate structure at the Board level and in the commissioning cycle is critical,” she said.

To learn more about WAPHA and Country WA PHN, visit www.wapha.org.au.

“In April this year the Australian Government appointed WA Primary Health Alliance to establish and operate the three Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in WA – Perth South, Perth North and Country WA,” said WAPHA Chair, Dr Richard Choong. “This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to place primary health care at the heart of the Western Australian health system and create the mechanism for integrating services across organisations and boundaries.”

Ms Richardson is the General Manager of the Country WA PHN, which leads the PHN covering the Western Australian regions of the Wheatbelt, Pilbara, Mid West and Gascoyne.

“I have a great understanding of what it is like to live in both rural and remote communities and the challenges for people working in health and community accessing health services.”

Ms Linda Richardson
Each year, Rural Health West publishes a rural general practice workforce analysis update.

Since 2009, the number of GP registrars has continually increased, with 131 noted to be practising as at 30 November 2014. This is the highest number recorded to date.

Western Australian General Practice Education and Training Limited (WAGPET) is the regional training provider for the State. They believe the increase in number of posts, their great locations and the variety of medicine on offer has contributed to the increase in the selection of rural practice as a place to get quality general practice training.

“GP registrars can also gain more varied experience than they would in a metropolitan post, particularly in obstetrics or anaesthetics where we are seeing an increased interest. There is also fantastic education and mentoring provided as well as attractive incentives with great community support,” said Dr Teresa Tierney, WAGPET Senior Medical Educator.

GP registrars now represent 15.7 per cent of the rural general practice workforce, an increase of 6 per cent since 2011.

The increase in this cohort has impacted on the average age of the rural general practice workforce, with a downward trend now noticeable.

“This is great news for the rural general practice workforce moving forward,” said Ms Belinda Bailey, Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer.

“The goal now is to work on the retention issues facing rural general practice so we can ensure this new cohort of rural general practitioners have a positive experience and elect to continue to support the rural communities of Western Australia.”

There has been an increase in the number of training posts available around the State and there is a range of attractive opportunities for registrars to train in rural locations. In the last financial year WAGPET was able to deliver 45 per cent of its training in rural or remote areas.

Dr Kaye Atkinson, WAGPET Clinical Director

The 2015 Annual GP Survey is out now

We encourage all currently practising rural general practitioners to complete their survey as it provides Rural Health West with valuable information on trends in the rural medical workforce. You can complete it online by visiting www.ruralhealthwest.com.au/onlinesurvey.

Please contact the database team if you require your log-on details by emailing database@ruralhealthwest.com.au.

Western Australia’s General Practice Workforce Analysis and Update is published in May each year.
Dr Cathy Milligan from the Margaret River Surgery, has supervised GP registrars for the last 10 years and was recently recognised for her contribution as the recipient of the RACGP Supervisor of the Year Award.

“The role of a supervisor is not arduous or time-consuming either, with no didactic teaching. It really involves discussions, corridor consultations or sitting in and reviewing topics. “It is very refreshing to have the young faces around, straight from university and the big teaching hospitals. It has benefited the local doctors too, as they assist us in staying up to date as well!”

Dr Peter Wutchak from the Collie River Medical Practice, who was also awarded General Practice of the Year by the RACGP, agrees.

“The registrars keep the practice fresh and vibrant, and by teaching, I ensure my knowledge is up-to-date,” he said.

The Collie River Medical Practice has been supervising GP registrars for the last 11 years and, like the Margaret River Surgery, has seen it as a way to promote the benefits of rural practice and encourage GP registrars to stay.

“As a previous rural GP registrar myself, I understand the importance of a welcoming and supportive supervisor. One of my fondest memories of training was dinner at the boss’s house. I encourage GP supervisors to share time outside work with their registrars. I have reciprocated with my registrars and hear my Weber pork roast is highly rated!”

Is your practice interested in training the rural general practitioners of the future?

Contact WAGPET to register your interest:
Ms Taylor O’Dea
Suite 12, 16 Brodie Hall Drive
Bentley Western Australia 6102
T 08 9473 8200
F 08 9472 4686
E trainingposts@wagpet.com.au
W www.wagpet.com.au

Due to the increasing interest in rural general practice, WAGPET is currently seeking rural general practices with passionate general practitioners to become supervisors for registrars on the Australian General Practice Training Program.
Dr Jackie Scurlock, who is a long-time provider of rural paediatric services to Esperance, was recently recognised for her dedication and commitment as the recipient of the AMA (WA) 2015 Hippocrates Award.

“The best part of my job is I never have to grow up,” she said after receiving her award.

Dr Scurlock commenced her visiting service to Esperance in early 1984.

“It was just after I had finished breastfeeding my second son. A local general practitioner, Dr Chris Friend had contacted Dr Rex Henderson to request he consider providing an outreach service to the area. However, he was too busy and recommended me.”

Dr Scurlock is a well-known paediatrician who has devoted herself to Western Australian families, in particular, the issues of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). In 1981, she established the Monitoring Clinic at Princess Margaret Hospital to provide support to parents who had lost a child to SIDS as well as assess babies with apparently life-threatening events. She chaired the Scientific Advisory Clinic for SIDS and Kids WA from 1991 to 2009 and also provided over two decades of support to Ngala.

Her visits to Esperance were self-funded until the introduction of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program. She now receives support through the Rural Health Outreach Fund.

“Dr Friend was amazing. He arranged for many specialists to visit the town, would collect us from the airport, provide us with breakfast at his home and then deliver us back to the airport at the end of the day,” said Dr Scurlock.

A rural visit involved departing Perth airport at 6.00am, flying in a ‘sardine tin’ and returning the same night at 9.00pm.

“Dr Friend insisted I work from his surgery as he felt the accommodation at the hospital was poor. This support has continued throughout the 30 plus years I have been visiting,” she said.

Initially, Dr Scurlock was not able to take advantage of the lovely Esperance scenery as she had to return home to her young family.

“Dr Friend encouraged me to arrive a day earlier and would host me at his home with his lovely wife Jo.”

Today, Dr Scurlock continues to provide her outreach services to the area five times a year.

“The area is lovely and, if I can walk along the beach at Castletown Quays, I can face any problem kid for the rest of the day!”

Dr Jackie Scurlock
Family Support Program –
Family matters

2016 Annual Conference and Trade Exhibition – Family Program

At Rural Health West, we understand the important role families play in the lives of rural medical practitioners.

That is why, for the last 25 years, we have provided a Family Program to offer support for spouses and children of rural doctors who attend our conferences.

In 2016, attendees will have the choice of going to Rottnest Island for a day trip or staying in Perth to visit the Aquarium of Western Australia (AQWA) and spend the afternoon at the movies.

Featuring some of the most spectacular white sandy beaches and bays, Rottnest Island is located 19 kilometres off the coast of Fremantle. The day trip will comprise of a ferry ride to and from the island, snorkelling and bike riding.

Those that choose to visit AQWA, will go on an underwater journey to discover the incredible and unique marine life of Western Australia. This will be followed by watching the latest blockbuster movie at the Innaloo movie complex.

Make sure you take this opportunity to have a fun day out and meet fellow rural families. More information about the Family Program will be available on our website in the coming weeks. You will need to register no later than 19 February 2016 if you are interested in taking part in this program.

Medical Spouse Training Bursary 2015-2016

Rural Health West is pleased to announce that we have awarded eight bursaries that will support partners of currently practising rural general practitioners to further their education. Recipients are located across Western Australia in Derby, Carnarvon, Broome, Katanning, Pemberton, Wandina and Kununurra.

Recipients will be undertaking studies to earn various certificates, diplomas and degrees in design, leadership, engineering, accounting and hospitality. We wish them all the best for their studies.

Applications for bursaries open in August each year and we encourage spouses of rural general practitioners to apply.
SAVE THE DATE  2016 conferences

Rural Health West Annual Conference and Trade Exhibition 2016
19 and 20 March 2016  |  Pan Pacific Perth

The yin and yang of rural health care
Men and women’s health from the adolescent to the elderly
Preliminary program now available online

Rural and Remote Retrieval Conference
19 to 22 May 2016
Emma Gorge Resort  |  El Questro Wilderness Park

Registrations now open
Sold out in 2015

Call for abstracts
Rural Health West invites abstract submissions for oral and e-poster presentations.
Abstracts about research and projects across all areas of Aboriginal health, community engagement, education and workforce development are sought.
Abstract submissions close on Monday 4 April 2016

The youth of today – the elders of tomorrow

For further information visit www.ruralhealthwest.com.au/conferences

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