

National Rural Health Alliance E-forum – 6 December 2002

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NEXT ROUND OF RAMUS SCHOLARSHIPS

The Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Kay Patterson, has announced the opening of another round of Rural Australia Medical Undergraduate Scholarships (RAMUS). Eighty scholarships of \$10,000 each will be offered to assist rural students who might otherwise be unable to study because of the added cost of accommodation, living and travel expenses, to pursue a career in medicine.

The scholarships are awarded on the basis of rural background and financial need. Rural background is defined as having lived in a rural or remote region of Australia for a minimum of five consecutive or eight cumulative years.

"There has been a dramatic increase in the rural intake of medical schools. In 1996, only 8% of the intake were students from rural areas. In 2001, 25% of students came from rural areas", Senator Patterson said.

RAMUS is administered by the National Rural Health Alliance. Applications remain open until 29 January 2003. Information on the application process is available by calling 1800 460 440 or at <http://www.nrha.net.au>.

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SOUTHERN SIGHTS AND SERVICES STUDY TOURS

While you're in Tasmania for the 7th National Rural Health Conference, why not take the opportunity to see Tasmanian collaborative rural health services in action, as well as experience the uniqueness that is Tasmania – historic sites, beautiful wild scenery, gourmet foods, fine wines and friendly people!

For further details of the pre and/or post study tours, contact Jenny Barns at the University Department of Rural Health, Tasmania on phone (03) 6324 4000, email

Jenny.Barns@utas.edu.au or visit the study tours website at
<http://www.ruralhealth.utas.edu.au/NRH7tours/>

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Interested in becoming a "friend" of the Alliance? Become more involved with the work of the Alliance by becoming a "friend". "friends" support the Alliance by being an integral part of the Alliance's policy and evaluation process. They also receive other benefits. For more information on membership see <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/friends.htm>

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From: Rommie Masarei <cppawa@arach.net.au>
Subject: WA State Rural Health Conference, Observation City 31 January & 1 February 2003.

Registrations have opened for a WA State Rural Health Conference to be held at Observation City, Scarborough on January 31st and February 1st, 2003.

The conference will be opened by the Premier of Western Australia, Hon Geoff Gallop and conference communique will be presented to the Minister for Health, Hon Bob Kucera, APM, MLA who will formally close the Conference.

The conference will be jointly hosted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Health WA, Silver Chain Nursing Association, St John of God Health Care and the WA Centre for Remote and Rural Medicine.

The conference will be focussed on four main themes to reflect the unique issues and opportunities we have in improving our health in the country - Dealing with distance and isolation, Diversity of rural communities, Harnessing community spirit and Rural health issues and future directions.

Early bird registrations close on 20 December 2002 (\$345) and final registrations will close on 17 January 2002 (\$395). Registration forms can be obtained from the conference organiser, Ms Rommie Masarei, Facsimile 08 9384 9663 or by email masarei@arach.net.au.

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PARTYline is the official newsletter of the National Rural Health Alliance. Keep up to date with rural health policy information and good news stories on living and working in the rural health community. Available online on <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/partyline.htm> or receive a hard copy by emailing michele@ruralhealth.org.au

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From: Michelle Wensley <mwens@doh.health.nsw.gov.au>
Subject: Internet Survey for all Health Managers in Australia

All Health Managers in Australia are invited to complete a web-based survey developed by Michelle Wensley who is currently undertaking Doctoral studies at the University of New England. The aim of the survey is to seek a better understanding of the attitudes of Australian Health Managers to clinicians accessing the Internet where care is delivered. The survey website is at <http://websurveyor.net/wsb.dll/8829/survey.htm> and will be available until the end of January 2003. If you prefer to complete the survey in hard copy, or have any enquiries, pls email Michelle at mwens@doh.health.nsw.gov.au or ph: 0429 372294

If you are a manager in health, I would be very grateful if you could complete the survey and also pass this email onto your colleagues.

And if you could advise of any other organisations or individuals I should contact who may be interested in completing the Survey - pls let me know!

Michelle Wensley
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Candidate, Doctor of Health Service Management
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email: mwens@doh.health.nsw.gov.au
Australian Health Managers' Internet Survey:
<http://websurveyor.net/wsb.dll/8829/survey.htm>

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BUSH CRISIS LINE - 1800 805 391

Bush Crisis Line is a twenty-four hour confidential telephone support and debriefing service for multi-disciplinary remote health practitioners and their families. It is staffed by qualified psychologists with remote and cross-cultural experience, is toll free and available from anywhere in Australia. For more information http://www.crana.org.au/pandp_psn.html

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NACCHO CALLS FOR OVERHAUL OF MAJOR HEALTH PROGRAM

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation called upon the Federal Government to overhaul one of its major health funding programs - the Aboriginal Primary Health Care Access Program - to make it more relevant and accessible to Aboriginal communities. The full text of the NACCHO statement is at <http://www.naccho.org.au/NACCHO.html>

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RDAA SEEKS HIGHER MEDICARE REBATE FOR RURAL PATIENTS

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia seeks higher Medicare reimbursement for rural patients when they see their local doctor in order to address the declining rate of bulk billing in country areas and remove one of the barriers to viable rural medical practice. The RDAA statement is available at

http://www.rdaa.com.au/the_case_for_increased_medicare_rebates_for_rural_patients.htm

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NEW AGED CARE PLACES FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Almost half of the 6561 new aged care places for 2002 have been allocated to rural and regional Australia, Federal Minister for Ageing Kevin Andrews has announced today. The full text of Mr Andrews' statement is available at

<http://www.health.gov.au/mediare1/yr2002/ka/ka02120.htm>

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The "Australian Journal of Rural Health" is a refereed journal with a national and international reputation for quality scholarship. Its focus is multi-disciplinary and it includes articles of interest to general practitioners, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, health administrators, universities and rural health units. Reduced rates apply to members of some organisations. For more information see <http://www.blackwell-science.com/ajr>

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From: Nick Stone <n.stone@unimelb.edu.au>
Subject: Interprofessional Education Symposium Proceedings

The proceedings of the recent Interprofessional Education Symposium held at the University of Melbourne Department of General Practice are now available online at

<http://www.gp.unimelb.edu.au/research/ripe/symposium/symposium.htm>

This site has a summary of the day's presentations, workshops and recommendations, including downloadable Powerpoint and Word files. Please direct inquiries to:

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Extracts from ABC Health-Updates

(Health-Updates is a weekly alert about recent ABC health coverage now available online. Information on how to subscribe is at <http://abc.net.au/health/subscribe.htm>)

NT INDIGENOUS MALNUTRITION GROWING (AM: 23/11/2002)

Figures released by the Royal Darwin Hospital show a 25 per cent increase in the number of children diagnosed with malnutrition and diarrhoea in the past three years. <http://abc.net.au/am/s733223.htm>

CONGRESS FOCUSES ON INDIGENOUS EAR HEALTH (PM: 4/12/2002)

The Congress on Infectious Diseases has heard that nearly one quarter of Indigenous babies and toddlers in the Northern Territory have eardrum perforations, a figure that the World Health Organisation considers a public health emergency. <http://abc.net.au/pm/s741007.htm>

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WHEN EMERGENCY STRIKES THE EMERGENCY LOCUM SERVICE DELIVERS

(Extract from "Regional Health Check", November 2002, available at <http://www.ruralhealth.gov.au/news/rhc.htm>)

In mid-February, Ross Myers and his wife Michelle, found that even the best-laid plans could go awry when it comes to babies and births.

Ross is the local pharmacist in Baradine, a small town located west of Tamworth and north of Coonabarabran.

"Three days before I was due to stop work, the doctor decided that the baby would have to be born by Caesarean section," said Ross.

He needed a locum fast.

"Baradine is two and a half hours from Tamworth and locums are few and far between. In desperation, I called the Emergency Locum Service (ELS) and within two hours they had located a locum. In 24 hours the locum was in Baradine picking up the reins."

"It was a huge relief being able to go away and spend time with my new family and not have to worry about my responsibilities to the community. Without their support, it meant either closing the pharmacy or me not being there to support my wife at this pretty exciting and important time in our lives."

Since it was launched earlier this year the ELS has placed 14 locums in rural and remote areas ensuring continued service to communities during times of illness and other emergencies.

The Emergency Locum Service is a key initiative of the Rural and Remote Pharmacy Workforce Development Program, which is part of the Third Community Pharmacy Agreement funded by the Commonwealth Government. For more information on the ELS contact the Pharmacy Guild on 02 6270 1888 or 1800 357 001 or

<http://www.guild.org.au/public/rrpwdp>

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AUSTRALIANS CAN HAVE THEIR SAY ABOUT HEALTH PRIVACY

Australians have the opportunity to have their say about national privacy rules for health information with the release of a draft National Health Privacy Code for comment, the Minister for Health and Ageing Kay Patterson and Attorney-General Daryl Williams said.

Senator Patterson and Mr Williams expect the Code to form the basis of a nationally consistent set of rules for the gathering and use of health information. The draft National Health Privacy Code has been developed by the National Health Privacy Working Group, a sub-group of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council.

Senator Patterson and her State and Territory colleagues have agreed to release the draft Code for a series of public consultations which will run until April 2003.

If implemented nationally, the Code would ensure that a set of uniform rules will apply across all States and Territories. The draft Code forms part of a broader national health privacy framework and is a joint Commonwealth, State and Territory initiative.

A copy of the code is available at <http://www.health.gov.au/pubs/nhpcode.htm>

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SOME CALIFORNIA PHYSICIANS WILL BE PAID FOR ONLINE ADVICE

(AMNews, 25 Nov 2002. Extract from Health Workforce Intelligence, November 2002)

Blue Shield of California, a large US health insurance organisation, intends to begin paying its contracted doctors for providing online consultations in 2003. This decision is based on preliminary findings from a study designed to measure return on investment to insurers from a commercial Web-based secure messaging system. Blue Shield and ConnectiCare, a health maintenance organisation, helped test the system paying \$20 (\$AUD35) per online consultation

involving minor, non-urgent matters. The study was conducted by Dr Laurence Baker from the Department of Health Research and Policy, Stanford University, California, and funded by Blue Shield and ConnectiCare. Laurence Baker analysed and compared the health care spending patterns of 2,274 patients who had access to the messaging system with those of 3,390 patients in a control group. He separately reviewed the two groups' claims for the 12 month period before the messaging service became available and for an 11 month period afterwards to 28 February 2002. He found that the health care spending for the control group was unchanged from one period to the other, while the group who had access to the messaging system spent on average \$1.87 (\$AUD3.33) less per member per month (PMPM) on office visits. Since the messaging system cost insurers 33 cents (\$AUD0.59) PMPM, insurers netted \$1.54 (\$AUD2.74) in savings PMPM. This means that Blue Shield could potentially save more than \$3 million (\$AUD5.34 million) a month once its 2 million members are eligible for online consultations. Of the 282 doctors who participated in the study 63% said they were likely to continue using the messaging system and 56% said they preferred handling patients' non-urgent health care needs over the Internet rather than at the surgery.

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7th NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

The 7th National Rural Health Conference is to be held at the Grand Chancellor in Hobart Tasmania from 1 - 4 March 2003. For the first time, online registration for the Conference is now available while the Conference program and details of associated events are also available at the Conference website at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/seventhconf/seventhconf.htm>

There are special registration deals for friends of the Alliance, those wishing to join friends, all the 120 or so paper givers, students, and day registrations.

For further information, contact Lyn Eiszele Conference Manager or Fiona Patterson, Conference Secretary (02) 6285 4660 email conference@ruralhealth.org.au

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CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

As such, the Alliance does not control postings and the contents do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Alliance. Nor do postings necessarily reflect the view of Jim Groves or any organisation he is associated with. Jim Groves can be contacted at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

The e-forum is sent to a mailing list of the Alliance and those have indicated interest through the subscription box at the NRHA Web site (<http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>). This issue is going to 1,182 recipients. Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

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