



## Media Release

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### **Female rural GPs lead agenda for change**

Current workplace policies do not reflect the needs of female GPs yet women comprise over 50% of medical graduates and 75% of enrolments into the 2002 Royal Australian College of General Practitioners rural medical course.

“Current programs are based on the traditional notions of a country GP – that is, a full-time, on-call doctor that has a supporting spouse,” says University of Ballarat PhD student, Imogen Schwarz. “Critical shortages of rural GPs are exacerbated by these workplace practices,” she said. “Female GPs and medical students are committed to rural practice but there needs to be changes to work and training structures based on principles of flexibility and fairness,” continued Ms Schwartz.

Key female doctors are pushing for change in the current structures but often meet resistance from men who still dominate decision-making roles. To counter this, female GPs are increasingly involved on boards and committees, making presentations at conferences and workshops and coordinating awareness raising activities on female rural GP issues.

One female rural GP described how she joined a medical board with a double agenda. “One was to assist with the writing, but the other agenda was to make sure that the recommendations around women were included in that document, because if you are not there keeping an eye on those things, they fall off the agenda.”

Ms Schwartz believes that changing current workplace practices to better suit the needs of female GPs will improve recruitment and retention of GPs and allied health professionals in rural areas. “The recommendation put forward is to build inclusive recruitment and retention rural workforce strategies for female rural GPs,” said Ms Schwartz.

**Imogen Schwarz will present a paper on her PhD study at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference, which will be held at the Hotel Grand Chancellor from March 1-4, 2003. Ms Schwarz will speak at 10:20am on Tuesday March 4 in the Ballroom Centre.**

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7<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference, 1 – 4 March 2003, Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart  
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