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MEDIA RELEASE

RURAL TRAINING CRUCIAL FOR MORE RURAL GPs

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PROVIDING rural general practice training is vital for ensuring a sustainable rural medical workforce, according to research published in today's *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Drs Matthew McGrail, Deborah Russell and David Campbell from Monash University also found that those who were from a rural background were more likely to later practise in a rural location.

"Seventy-four to 91% of rural origin/rural training cohort GPs remained in rural areas, with 61%–70% remaining in the same community [in which they trained]," the authors wrote.

"Conversely, 87–95% of metropolitan origin/metropolitan training cohort GPs remained in metropolitan areas."

However, the numbers of doctors with both rural origin and training are not sufficient to sustain the rural GP workforce, as only 25% of Australian doctors are originally from rural areas, while about 30% of Australians live in rural locations.

According to the researchers, doctors from metropolitan areas who trained rurally remained a major source of non-International Medical Graduate rural GPs, and were therefore critical for the rural GP workforce.

In an accompanying editorial, Professor Geetha Ranmuthugala of the University of New England reiterated that retaining both metropolitan and rural origin doctors in the bush remained a challenge.

Although McGrail and colleagues found that doctors from metropolitan areas were very likely to practise in rural areas after completing vocational training in the bush, "their findings also suggest that these effects had started to diminish by 4 years post-training", Professor Ranmuthugala wrote.

As doctors in rural areas are more likely to work longer hours and to travel to very remote locations, they find it more difficult to participate in professional development and other training opportunities, she wrote.

"Innovative business and work model solutions are needed to support the rural GP workforce," she wrote.

Doctors practising in rural and remote areas need procedural skills in areas such as general surgery, obstetrics, anaesthesia, radiology and endoscopy.

"As exercising one's skills contributes to increased job satisfaction, motivation, commitment and retention, there is a need to provide the infrastructure and opportunity for these practitioners to enhance and practise the procedural skills that have been identified as an important aspect of rural practice," Professor Ranmuthugala recommended.

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CONTACTS:
Dr Matthew McGrail 0427 624 070
Monash University Media Communications Unit 03 9903 4840

Dr Geetha Ranmuthugala 02 6773 3678 / 0475 963 961
Estelle Boshoff, UNE Corporate Communication Officer 02 6773 2551