

16/11/2023

Re: Consultation on the recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine

I am writing in support of a proposal to recognise Rural Generalist Medicine as a speciality within General Practice.

I serve as the Director of Clinical Training for the Rural Generalist Pathway of Western Australia (RGPWA). I am a Rural Generalist GP and we currently have 100 participants on the pathway.

As an advocate for rural health care and a firm believer in the importance of addressing the unique healthcare needs of rural communities, I strongly believe that in recognition of Rural Generalism as a speciality, there will be benefits to both the communities they serve as well as to the health care system that serves these communities.

Rural Generalism refers to an enhanced scope of practice within General Practice that enables medical practitioners with skills necessary to provide comprehensive care in their rural and remote communities. This includes primary care and additional training and expertise in advanced skills that provide knowledge and competence to manage complex and diverse health care needs in rural communities.

Recognising Rural Generalist Medicine as a speciality offers several benefits to the community. These include:

1. **Access to Comprehensive Care:** Rural Generalists are equipped to provide a broad range of medical services, including Emergency Medicine, Obstetrics, Anaesthetics, Paediatrics, Mental Health, First Nations Health, Palliative Care, Surgery. Population Health, Remote Medicine and chronic disease management. By consolidating multiple specialities into a single practitioner, rural communities gain access to comprehensive care that would otherwise be challenging to provide due to limited resources and geographical constraints.
2. **Continuity of Care:** Rural Generalists often establish long-term relationships with their patients, allowing for continuity of care. This continuity is vital for managing chronic conditions, coordinating care between different specialists and building trust and rapport with patients. By recognising Rural Generalism as a speciality, we can further promote and support the delivery of continuous, patient-centered care in rural communities.
3. **Improved Health Outcomes:** Rural Generalists possess advanced skills and knowledge to manage complex medical conditions. By providing appropriately skilled practitioners who can diagnose, treat, and manage a wide range of conditions, including those that require specialist expertise, rural communities can experience improved health outcomes.
4. **Improved Retention of Medical Practitioners:** Recognition of the Advanced skills that Rural Generalists will provide clarity and allow retention of skilled medical professionals in rural areas. This will reduce the reliance on contracted medical practitioner (locums) and improve workforce stability and reduce costs overall for health systems.

5. Enhanced Emergency Care: As per the Collingrove definition, a Rural Generalist has skills in Primary Care, Emergency care, as well as an additional Advanced skill that meet their community need. Often rural areas often face challenges in accessing emergency care due to limited resources and long distances to facilities with face to face care from a medical practitioner. Recognising Rural Generalism as speciality will equip practitioners with the necessary skills to provide emergency care in these remote areas. This will lead to shorter response times, improved stabilisation of patients and better outcomes for those in need if urgent medical attention.

Costs for health systems can be reduced with appropriate management closer to home without the need for transfer to larger centers.

6. Health System Sustainability: By recognising Rural Generalism as a speciality, we can strengthen the rural healthcare system's sustainability. This recognition will encourage medical students and practitioners to pursue additional training and qualifications in Rural Generalism, ensuring a steady supply of skilled healthcare professionals in rural areas. It will also facilitate collaboration between healthcare providers and metropolitan specialists, leading to improved coordination and integration of care.
7. Closing the Gap: Additional training in First Nations Health and recognition of that skill in Generalist Medicine will allow greater retention and improved health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This will be one of the ways the current health inequality can be addressed in this vulnerable population.

In conclusion, recognising Rural Generalism as a speciality within General Practice will have profound positive impacts on rural communities, It will address the healthcare challenges specific to these areas, improve access to comprehensive care, enhance health outcomes, and contribute to the overall sustainability of the rural healthcare system.

I urge the Medical Board of Australia to consider this proposal and take the necessary steps to recognise and support Rural Generalism as a speciality within General Practice. The current declining numbers of GP trainees has been counteracted by an increase interest in Rural Generalist training. This alternate pathway within General Practice will be an important element to provide holistic models of care in rural and remote communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and seeking consultation from the community for this vital and potential system changing process for the future of Australia's healthcare.

Yours Sincerely

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