



Media Release

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Overseas doctors essential in the bush

Rural Health Workforce Australia CEO, Dr Kim Webber, says overseas-trained medical graduates are an essential way of addressing the doctor shortage in rural and remote Australia.

She was responding to calls by the AMA for the Federal Government to abandon its policy that international medical graduates work in rural areas for up to 10 years.

"The 10-year moratorium is vital for staffing remote and rural practices. Our workforce in the country would be decimated if you got rid of it and the AMA needs to be careful that it doesn't throw the baby out with the bathwater on this issue," she says.

"If that policy was unilaterally dropped, I don't know how places like the Kimberley and Brewarrina would ever be staffed. These communities understand this and greatly appreciate the work these doctors do there."

Dr Webber says the reality is there is a shortage of doctors in rural and remote areas and part of the solution is the employment of international medical graduates.

"The fact is that rural Australia is reliant on overseas-trained doctors, at least until sufficient numbers of new medical graduates are appropriately trained in Australia," she says.

"The recent expansion of medical schools and undergraduate places in Australia is intended to make Australia more self-reliant but it will be at least several years until these graduates move into the workforce. New rural relocation incentives for doctors, beginning on 1 July, should also make a difference."

Rural Health Workforce Australia aims to boost the number of doctors serving rural and remote Australia, including Indigenous communities. It is the peak body for the Rural Workforce Agencies which recruit and support rural and remote GPs in each state and the Northern Territory.

"Recruiting the right doctors to address each community's needs is a critical issue and a complex process," Dr Webber says. "We need to ensure all doctors applying for positions in Australia are suitably qualified and have an appropriate employment history."

"The next step is to provide support for the doctor and his or her family in their new community. Our Rural Workforce Agencies are committed to making this happen in order to keep these GPs in rural areas."

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