

To the Medical Board of Australia,

I am writing to you to voice my support for the recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine as a new field of specialty practice within General Practice. As a trainee GP Obstetrician, my lived experiences of working and training in rural and regional NSW, leave me without a doubt that the recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine is vital to ensure the delivery of quality healthcare to rural communities.

I believe that recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine will improve access to training opportunities for doctors who are interested in pursuing this career. This will ultimately benefit rural communities by increasing the number of general practitioners with an extended scope of practice in these areas. The foundation for Rural Generalist Medicine has been set with the formation of programs like the HETI Rural Generalist Training Program. I recall seeing this program advertised in the regional hospital where I worked as a junior doctor and I was inspired to follow my quietly reserved aspirations of becoming a GP Obstetrician. I say quietly reserved aspirations because up until this point, there were very few people to whom I had revealed this goal who did not respond with a slightly confused expression, or even more direct words of discouragement.

Despite the support of such existing programs to facilitate rural generalist training, there remains significant barriers in the current training environment toward acquiring the additional skills required for this role. For example, whilst undertaking training in obstetrics and gynaecology, there were instances in which I was denied training opportunities in favour of my colleagues who were pursuing RANZCOG fellowship. In particular, I recall a consultant who commented that I was not allowed to perform an artificial rupture of membranes for a woman in the birthing unit, because I was not a "real O&G registrar". I think this behaviour highlights attitudes in larger regional hospitals, where the distinction between a rural generalist, and a general practitioner, is often not understood, and not valued.

Support for rural generalist trainees in regional centers is a critical step in the pipeline toward creating a general practitioner workforce with rural generalist skillsets. Regional hospitals provide an opportunity to develop foundational skills. They offer exposure to specialty units, with larger patient populations, so that confidence can be acquired in managing the common conditions within these fields. Case numbers are lower in the rural areas where rural generalist GPs practice and so without the support of regional centers it really is not possible to develop the necessary skills. Without recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine, Australian communities will lose the opportunity to train rural generalist GPs from inception.

Sincerely,

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