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1 December 2023

Executive Officer – Medical
AHPRA
GPO Box 9958
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Re: Consultation on the Recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine

This is to express my support for the joint-application to have Rural Generalist Medicine recognised as a specialist field within General Practice.

I have lived and worked in rural Australia for over 40 years. My work was as a rural physiotherapist, and I would refer to myself as a Generalist. It is what is called of us as rural practitioners. Sadly, generalism has almost become a derogatory term when specialisation has been the direction so many areas have taken over the last decades. It is time for the concept of generalism to be fully appreciated for the vital role it plays. Not only as a societal glue but in rural areas as a deep foundation for healthcare.

There is an urgent need to improve access to care for people living in rural and remote areas including remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I believe that a strong Rural Generalist workforce can make a significant contribution to improving these peoples' access to high quality care and through this to bringing their health status closer to parity with that of Australians living in cities.

Rural Generalists are comprehensively trained to provide as much care close to home as they safely can, to meet the needs of the patients that they serve in rural and remote areas. People in these areas have less access to every kind of medical and allied health specialist than their counterparts in cities and receive far fewer services.

The people most likely to rely on the local care that can be provided through the broad scope of services of a Rural Generalist, are the people in these communities with the most disadvantage who cannot afford or have considerable difficulty in traveling to cities for care.

National recognition of the training and professional standards of care that these doctors provide will give confidence to rural communities in the care they receive. It will also provide the current Rural Generalist workforce with the status commensurate with their actual training and scope, and which will advance an aspirational rural career path for future generations of doctors.

I expect that national specialist recognition will also enable structural change by enabling credentialing, employment, and workforce planning to fully incorporate these doctors and to build resources and models of care around their full scope of service.

Rural Generalists do not work in isolation but are a critical part of the local healthcare team, all members of which are of utmost importance to rural and remote communities.

Recognition will however maximise the contribution these doctors are able to make within their local teams for their local communities. We expect it will also contribute to a stronger national network of doctors to service rural and remote communities into the future.

And I hope it can also pave the way for the other health professionals in rural and remote Australia to be given the opportunity to be recognized as well for the role they all play in the delivery of health services in the Bush. A team approach is vital and we all need to support each other in this endeavor.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Nikki Thompson.

Nikki Thompson BPhy, Grad Cert Neuroleadership

CRG member ACRRM