

# ***RURAL DOCTORS ASSOCIATION (NSW) INC***

Media release – Tuesday 29 March 2011

## **Rural doctors urge NSW Health to reverse “appalling decision” on rural internships**

**The Rural Doctors Association of NSW (RDA NSW) says NSW Health must urgently reverse an “appalling decision” that will see medical students from NSW, who are studying medicine at the Australian National University in Canberra, unable to secure internship positions at rural NSW hospitals.**

Guaranteed intern places under the Rural Preferential Recruitment (RPR) Scheme have now been restricted only to medical graduates from NSW universities. Previously students from interstate universities who had completed their HSC in NSW were also guaranteed an internship in rural NSW hospitals. The decision means that NSW-origin medical students who are studying at the ANU will not have guaranteed offers of internships in rural NSW.

This is despite the fact that there is a critical shortage of doctors across rural NSW, and substantial evidence that medical students who experience rural practice are much more likely to become rural doctors upon graduation.

RDA NSW President, Dr Tilak Dissanayake, said he was “extremely disappointed” that NSW Health was refusing to guarantee rural internships for these students.

“Given the critical shortage of doctors right across rural NSW, it is astonishing that NSW Health will not guarantee these internship positions to NSW-origin medical students studying at the ANU—many of whom are crying out to undertake their internships in rural NSW, not in Sydney” Dr Dissanayake said.

“Many of the students studying medicine at the ANU are from NSW—in fact, of the last three intakes, 37%, 45% and 46% listed a NSW address as their home address on application.

“Many of these students are enrolled in ANU’s Rural Clinical School which extends its footprint across south-east and south-west NSW and utilises rural NSW practices, hospitals and health services to provide training to its students.

“All ANU Medical School students spend 8 weeks in the rural NSW regions surrounding Canberra, and 25% of the Year 3 cohorts spend an entire year in rural south-east NSW.

“These regions would dearly love to see ANU medical students return to their communities to undertake their internships and help meet local doctor shortages, and many of the students would love to return to the practices and communities that have supported them during their training—so the only barrier between the rural communities and the medical students themselves seems to be NSW Health!

“Given the universally acknowledged shortage of doctors in rural Australia, particularly in rural NSW, it is a major concern that students from the ANU’s Medical School—which is so committed to delivering the rural doctors of the future—should be disadvantaged like this.

“We call on NSW Health to urgently reconsider its position on this issue, and to guarantee rural internships in NSW for those medical students from NSW who are studying at the ANU Medical School.

“We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this critical issue with the incoming NSW Government and NSW Health Minister in the coming weeks.”

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**Available for interview:** RDA NSW President, Dr Tilak Dissanayake, on 0488 732 679.  
**Alternative media contact:** Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.