

Media release — Thursday 17 March 2011

Country NSW medical students win inaugural scholarships

Two medical students from country NSW have been announced as the inaugural winners of *The Land* and Rural Doctors Association of NSW (RDA NSW) Rural Medical Scholarships for 2011.

Hannah Kelly from Uralla and Matthew Binks from Mudgee will each receive \$15,000 to support them while they undertake their medical studies. RDA NSW will also provide ongoing mentoring for the students, with Hannah and Matthew each being allocated RDA NSW committee members (all practising rural doctors) as their mentors.

General Manager of *The Land*, John Dwyer, said the scholarships were launched by *The Land* this year to coincide with its 100th anniversary.

“Given the critical shortage of doctors in rural and remote NSW—and indeed across Australia—we thought it was important for *The Land* to support those medical students who are most likely to return to the bush to practise after graduation—that is, those who were raised in the bush in the first place. We hope that these annual scholarships will make it easier for rural students to go on to study medicine, and to then return to rural Australia to provide the medical services that are so desperately needed.”

President of RDA NSW and a rural doctor in Coolah, NSW, Dr Tilak Dissanayake, said RDA NSW was delighted to be part of *The Land's* initiative to support country students while they undertake their medical degree.

“It is great to see that, even after 100 years, *The Land* is still strongly supporting rural Australia. Medicine is a very demanding course and leaves little time for students to earn any income through part-time work. The scholarships aim to encourage more country students to study medicine while also helping to cover the living away from home expenses that country students in particular face in studying medicine.”

Hannah Kelly, in her second year of Medicine at the University of NSW, said while she is not yet sure exactly what field she will specialise in, she definitely plans to practise in a rural area in the future. “I am really interested in obstetrics and gynaecology, but practising as a rural general practitioner with advanced skills training also appeals to me” she said. “I completed some work experience with a rural generalist doctor and the variety made it both interesting and challenging.”

Matthew Binks, in his third year of Medicine at the University of NSW, said he too is planning on returning to the bush to practise once qualified. “When I first came to Sydney for university I was really taken with the lifestyle, but the more time I have spent here the more I realise how much I miss the bush” he said. “I definitely see myself returning to the country once I complete my studies. Growing up in Mudgee I developed a connection with the land, and working as a country doctor is a real opportunity to give back to the community. At this point I am considering a career as a general practitioner or in general surgery—both are desperately needed in country towns.”

Both Hannah and Matthew expressed their appreciation for the scholarships, saying they would assist significantly in relieving the financial pressures involved in completing their studies.

Photos are available of Hannah Kelly and Matthew Binks (please contact Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638 or comms@rdaa.com.au).

Available for interview: Dr Tilak Dissanayake on 0488 732 679 and John Dwyer on 0419 232 755.
Hannah Kelly on 0432 217 046 and Matthew Binks on 0457 723 249.

Alternative media contact: Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638.