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Rural doctor recognised for 'significant and dedicated' service

ACRRM-RDAA Peter Graham 'Cohuna' Award 2011

A doctor who has provided exceptional medical service to his rural community for more than three decades has received the ACRRM-RDAA Peter Graham 'Cohuna' Award for 2011.

Dr Les Woollard, who has practised in the rural NSW town of Moree for the past 31 years, also received the award for his outstanding advocacy in the area of rural medicine and rural health.

The award is presented annually by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) in honour of the late Dr Peter Graham AO, who passed away in 2008, aged 80. Dr Graham provided dedicated service as a doctor to Cohuna, in rural Victoria, for nearly 50 years.

RDAA President, Dr Paul Mara, said Dr Woollard is a much-loved and highly valued member of both the Moree community and the wider community of rural doctors.

"Les is a rural generalist doctor of the old school, running a general practice in town, providing medical services at the Moree Hospital, and delivering more babies during his time in Moree than you can count.

"His patients love him and find him caring, trustworthy and understanding. He is also extremely passionate about improving access to healthcare for rural Australians, and about putting in place measures that will train and entice more young doctors to the bush.

"He served for many years as President of the Rural Doctors Association of NSW and has also volunteered his time and skills to numerous other medical and health organisations at a national, state and local level.

Originally from Melbourne, Dr Woollard graduated from Melbourne University before spending time in Perth, Bendigo and the United Kingdom where he undertook further training in the areas of oncology, psychiatry and paediatrics, as well as advanced training in obstetrics and anaesthetics.

He said he was extremely honoured to be recognised by his peers with the award.

"I've been fortunate to work in a wonderful town with some really great doctors. We have a very supportive community of rural doctors in and around Moree and we all work well together" he said.

"I originally came to Moree for a short-term position, but 31 years later I am still here. I have brought up my four children here, and it has always been a fantastic town to raise a family. Of course, I couldn't have worked the hours I have over the years without the support of my wonderful wife Michele."

ACRRM President, Professor Richard Murray, said that despite Dr Woollard's heavy workload he has always been, and still is, willing to get in and drive issues, particularly regarding poor access to health services and the loss of procedural doctors in rural NSW.

"Les is very passionate about the need to make access to healthcare equitable for all rural Australians and he has been prepared to put in the effort to fight for this" Professor Murray said.

“He is a dedicated teacher and has Clinical Lecturer appointments with the University of Sydney, University of New South Wales and the University of Newcastle. He is also a GP supervisor and has trained many registrars and students during his time in Moree.

“This demonstrates in itself the strong commitment that Les has not only to the community of Moree but to the future of rural medicine in Australia.”

Dr Les Woollard, Dr Paul Mara and Professor Richard Murray are available for interview.

A photo of Dr Woollard is also available.

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