



Media release
Friday 28 October 2011

Embargoed — for print / broadcast after 12.01am Sunday 30 October 2011

Doctor in flood-ravaged Victorian town named Rural Registrar of the Year

Victorian Registrar Dr Adele van der Merwe has been awarded Rural Registrar of the Year, in recognition of her dedication, hard work and willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty during her year-long tenure in the town of Charlton.

Dr van der Merwe was presented the award during a gala dinner at Rural Medicine Australia 2011, the national conference of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), held in Alice Springs on Saturday night.

ACRRM President, Dr Jeff Ayton, said that Dr van der Merwe made a lasting impact on both the town's residents and medical staff with her cheerful attitude, dedication and wealth of knowledge.

"While Adele was based in Charlton the town was flooded twice, and both times Adele demonstrated her commitment and support for the community, continuing to provide much needed care at all hours and in all circumstances through these times of crisis," Dr Ayton said.

"The overwhelming support for her nomination we received from her colleagues in Charlton demonstrated the impact she made during her time there, and what a highly deserving recipient she is of this prestigious award."

Dr van der Merwe was amazed that she had won the award, and said that she was overwhelmed by the support she had received during her year in Charlton and would like to dedicate the award to the people of the town.

"The people of Charlton are still suffering the devastation of having lost homes, pets, livestock, income, their hospital, aged care facility and medical clinic.

"Despite all this, they have maintained their community spirit, their resilience and that great country sense of humour.

"I am humbled and honoured that they nominated me for this award."

Dr van der Merwe was born in South Africa before her family immigrated to Western Australia. She completed a Bachelor of Science (Hons) at the University of Western Australia, and after travelling and working for several years, completed her graduate medical course at The University of Sydney.

While completing her training, she spent time in Coonabarabran (western NSW) in Katherine (NT), and with the 'inspiring' May Rosas, Wardaman traditional owner and acting CEO at the time of the Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service.

Dr van der Merwe said she was drawn to the pragmatic nature of the rural GPs she met.

"What I find most rewarding about rural medical practice is that complex, or even simple, situations need more than good medical knowledge to manage," Dr van der Merwe said.

"It is always a challenge and you need to think 'outside the box' to find practical solutions when you may not have the ideal equipment to hand."

Dr van der Merwe is also an active advocate for the Australian Lesbian Medical Association, of which she is currently a co-convenor, and works to promote many of their projects including DocLIST, which is a register of doctors recommended by same-sex attracted women.

Dr Paul Mara, President of RDAA, said that Dr van der Merwe's willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty was a key factor in her winning Rural Registrar of the Year.

"During Adele's year of placement in Charlton, despite her own accommodation being flooded out twice, Adele found her own temporary accommodation with a relative in a nearby town and continued her service to the community," Dr Mara said.

"She also provided much needed 'roadside' medical care at the town's evacuation point and later volunteered to work in the temporary medical facility – the 'Charlton Field Primary Care Clinic' even after her tenure in Charlton had finished, driving 180kms to get there on her day off," Dr Mara said.

"Throughout her whole time in Charlton she worked tirelessly to promote good health in the community, actively supporting Chronic Disease Programs such as Diabetes Australia's "The Life Program", which saw a noticeable increase in the number of patients who quit smoking and lost significant amounts of weight thanks largely to Adele's influence.

"She is a very deserving recipient of this year's award, and it is exciting to see such a passionate and talented young doctor pursuing a career in rural medicine," Dr Mara said.

Westpac's National Head of Healthcare, Craig Anderson, said Westpac was again proud to support RDAA and its award-winners in 2011.

"Westpac is delighted to support the recognition of dedicated individuals to improving rural and remote health and their outstanding achievements and commitment.

"Westpac has a long history of supporting communities and important works. We see the RDAA and the work of rural doctors and care givers as being as important as any we currently support. It is imperative that we work together to ensure continued investment in rural services which sustain healthy economies in regional and rural areas.

"Westpac looks forward to continuing to provide support to RDAA, its members and rural communities across Australia."

Media interviews with Dr Jeff Ayton, Dr Paul Mara and Dr Adele van der Merwe are available.

A photo of Dr van der Merwe is also available.

Media contact: Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638 (Sunday only) or Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.