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R U OK? Day — www.ruok.org.au

Mental health support for rural doctors to feature strongly at national conference

Rural Medicine Australia
19-21 October 2017
Pullman Hotel, Melbourne
#RMA17 | www.ruralmedicineaustralia.com.au

Recent tragic suicides of doctors have highlighted how stressful a medical career can be and how vital it is for health professionals to take care of themselves and their colleagues.

On R U OK? Day (today, 14 September), organisers of the forthcoming Rural Medicine Australia 2017 conference (RMA17) have unveiled important sessions to help rural and remote doctors manage the pressures of their work.

The multiple sessions will explore the factors contributing to a doctor's mental health and wellbeing, highlight avenues of mental health support for rural doctors and other health professionals, and outline tools that can assist doctors who require support.

The conference will also consider whether the current mandatory reporting requirements for doctors who seek mental health support from colleagues are deterring doctors from seeking this help.

RMA17 is the major annual conference for Australia's rural and remote doctors. It is hosted by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA).

ACRRM President, Professor Ruth Stewart, said: "Resilience is a huge factor in the success of a rural or remote doctor. It's not uncommon for a rural GP to be working seven days a week in a combination of locations such as the local hospital, general practice and also be involved in emergency retrievals. Working around the clock impacts the physical health, mental health and stress levels of these doctors.

"ACRRM held successful General Practitioner Mental Health sessions at the World Rural Health Conference in Cairns earlier this year. In response to this interest, we are giving RMA17 delegates the opportunity to hear from experts about ways to maintain their mental health when working as a rural or remote doctor.

"Junior doctors at RMA17 will also benefit from a session on mental health, with a panel discussion answering the lifelong question, *"Who takes care of the doctor in need?"*

“Alarming figures released earlier this year show that at least 20 doctors in NSW alone took their own lives in the 10 years leading up to 2016*. That’s two young doctors every year.

“Sessions at our conference will investigate the threat to the wellbeing of junior doctors across the country, discussing ways to combat the issue at a personal, policy and structural level.”

RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said: "Doctors who practise in rural and remote areas are faced with challenges that can sometimes feel overwhelming.

“While many rural doctors have experienced feeling professionally isolated, it is important they know there are support networks available to them, and how best to access these from their rural or remote setting.

“RMA17 will not only feature the interactive panel session, facilitated by Dr Justin Azzopardi and involving *beyondblue*, but also another great session — “*Getting the most out of online mental health resources*” — by Dr Jan Orman from the Black Dog Institute, aimed at benefitting the management of both patient and doctor mental health.

“This is the third year in a row at RMA that we have featured important sessions on how doctors can take care of themselves.

“RDAA and ACRRM are strongly committed to helping rural doctors across Australia to provide supportive and positive workplaces for their colleagues and staff, and to access any mental health support they may need themselves.

"These key sessions at RMA17 are just one way we are reaching out to rural and remote doctors on this critical issue."

* **See related article** — <https://au.news.yahoo.com/nsw/a/34695413/fourth-young-nsw-doctors-suicide-exposes-medicine-s-shameful-secret>

More information on RMA17 (including the full program) can be found at www.ruralmedicineaustralia.com.au.

Available for interview:

RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, on 0419 427 520

ACRRM President, Professor Ruth Stewart (via Rachelle Forbes)

RDAA CEO, Peta Rutherford, on 0427 638 374

Alternative media contacts:

Ineke Kuiper (RDAA) on 0408 669 638 (Thursday and Friday)

Rachelle Forbes (ACRRM) on 07 3105 8200 or 0432 275 926

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