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## Rural doctors pay the price for education cuts

**Rural doctors will be particularly disadvantaged by the recent announcement of a cap to the taxation deductions for self-education expenses, limiting the amount they can claim for the life-saving training they complete each year.**

These reforms limit the amount doctors can tax-deduct for self-funded work-related education expenses to \$2,000 per person from 1 July 2014 – not even enough to cover the registration fee for many courses.

Dr Sheilagh Cronin, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), said this was a direct blow to the ability of doctors in the bush to maintain and increase their skill levels so that they can deliver the level of health care needed by their communities.

“The nature of rural medical practice means that, in order to be able to deliver the advanced skills needed in rural communities, these doctors have to acquire a wide range of skills, many of which can only be gained or updated through self-funded courses,” Dr Cronin said.

“These courses are usually expensive, and the \$2,000 cap will mean that many won’t even be able to claim the registration fee for a single course as a tax deduction next year, let alone the significant extra travel and accommodation costs incurred.

“On top of that, many of us have to meet the cost of a locum doctor to keep our practices running and to provide health care to the communities in our absence, placing an additional impost on rural practitioners.”

Dr Cronin said that rural doctors often undertook additional training so they could provide a better service to their patients, but the cost of this training was not necessarily recognised by the fees charged for these services.

“We do not want to see an outcome where rural doctors feel compromised in their ability to provide these services to their patients.

“RDAA calls on the Government to review the recent announcement, with a view to making the reforms more appropriate to the circumstances of rural medical practice.”

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