



**RURAL DOCTORS
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Media release

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Attention: South Australian / health / rural media

Energetic and respected rural doctor wins coveted award

The Peter Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award 2009

One of Australia’s most high profile and energetic rural doctors, Dr Peter Rischbieth, has been named the winner of the prestigious ACRRM-RDAA Peter Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award for 2009.

The extremely dedicated rural doctor based in Murray Bridge, South Australia, is only the second recipient of the Award, which is presented jointly by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA). Dr Rischbieth received the Award at RDAA and ACRRM’s *Rural Medicine Australia 2009* conference, held in Melbourne over the weekend.

Dr Rischbieth is RDAA’s immediate past-President, a past-President of the Rural Doctors Association of South Australia (RDASA), is now Vice President of RDASA, and has previously served as RDAA’s representative on the ACRRM Board. He was also a key member of the South Australian Country Health Care Plan Taskforce.

Dr Rischbieth has been a rural GP obstetrician and anaesthetist at Bridge Clinic rural medical practice since 1987. He was, for many years, the Principal Medical Officer and Board Member of the Murray Bridge Soldiers Memorial Hospital.

He recently made national headlines when he enlightened Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on the realities of life for rural doctors and their patients during Mr Rudd’s visit to the Bridge Clinic rural medical practice (at which he is a partner) a few weeks ago, following RDAA’s invitation to Mr Rudd to do so.

Colleagues describe Dr Rischbieth as well-respected and loved by hundreds of patients and families, and say he is now starting to deliver his second generation of local families.

He has earned a well-deserved reputation of being available for his patients, the teaching and training of medical students and junior doctors, the media and the numerous organisations he represents.

“When he was RDAA President, it was not unusual for Peter to be awake for much of the night delivering a baby at Murray Bridge, then fly to Canberra early the next morning to attend an important meeting around health policy—and all the while know in fine detail the issues being discussed, make a significant contribution to the discussion at hand, and still have a smile on his face at the end of a long day!” RDAA CEO, Steve Sant, said.

“His personable nature and unending willingness to go ‘above and beyond the call’ also has made him highly-respected and much-liked by RDAA and ACRRM board-members and staff, and by his colleagues and staff at the Bridge Clinic rural medical practice.”

ACRRM President, Dr Jeff Ayton, said he believed Dr Rischbieth was the kind of dedicated doctor that Dr Peter Graham (in whose memory the Award is provided) would have been proud to see honoured by the Award.

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“Peter is passionate about rural general practice and is a tireless advocate of the need to provide better access to quality healthcare in rural and remote Australia. He also has been a great advocate for rural medical training and procedural practice” Dr Ayton said.

“Willingly and enthusiastically, he takes on a huge workload outside his clinical responsibilities. He is the one you can always rely on to put up his hand to represent the issues of rural health and rural doctors. He devotes hundreds of his own hours to lobbying and campaigning for rural health both at a national level and in his own state of South Australia, and he does so without complaint. He’s probably the last person to think he deserves this honour, which makes him all the more worthy of it.”

RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said she knew she had big shoes to fill when she took over from Dr Rischbieth as RDAA President last year.

“Peter has incredible energy and intellectual capacity—he’ll aptly skip from providing anaesthetics or delivering a baby one minute to carrying out a national radio interview the next and then happily get through a long line of patients in the waiting room, yet amazingly he still seems to find time for his very close family...and even his jogging!” Dr Maxfield said.

“As RDAA President, Peter was closely involved in the development of the proposed Rural Rescue Package produced by RDAA and the AMA, significantly raised the profile of rural health issues during the 2007 federal election campaign and, on the industrial front, oversaw a groundbreaking decision by the ACCC which gave RDAA and the state Rural Doctors Associations the right to collectively negotiate contracts for their rural doctor members who provide services at rural hospitals.

“He also attended countless meetings to provide a rural doctor voice on key health policy issues, undertook hundreds of media interviews during his time as President (particularly during the 2007 federal election campaign) and in his own state of South Australia went out all guns blazing last year to protest a proposed State Government plan which would have seen the closure of services at over 40 rural hospitals across the state. Indeed, he was a central driving force behind the statewide campaign to convince the SA Government to retract the plan, and he was on the Taskforce then formed by the SA Government to determine how local access to health services for SA’s country communities could be enhanced.

“On a lighter note, Peter’s commitment to rural health was illustrated early in his tenure as RDAA President when he threatened to make a naked dash through Adelaide to get the media to pay more attention to rural health issues! Fortunately, he was able to make a media splash without having to resort to this!

“Colleagues describe Peter as being particularly keen to support medical students and trainees on rural clinical placements and, in so doing, encourage them to consider rural practice as a future career path. They tell me Peter often has local school graduates sitting in his consulting room experiencing what it’s like to be a rural doctor.

“Peter participates actively in Bridge Clinic’s education roster and goes out of his way to give visiting students, interns and registrars the full rural experience—spending extra time with them on weekends, showing them the local jogging routes, inviting them to the deliveries of babies and attending local sporting fixtures.

“He is always available to have a meal or catch up for a coffee with any visiting GP who may be considering Bridge Clinic as a future workplace. His knowledge of rural medicine and the wider healthcare environment is extensive and these years of experience shine through when he promotes rural practice.

“All at RDAA and ACRRM warmly congratulate Peter on this well-deserved honour, and on behalf of all rural doctors who have benefited from his work I wish him well as he continues to fight the good fight” Dr Maxfield said.

The Peter Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award is in memory of Dr Peter Graham who passed away in 2008, aged 80. Dr Graham was a dedicated doctor in the rural Victorian town of Cohuna for nearly 50 years. He was inaugural President of the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria and actively involved in ACRRM. Dr Graham received the Order of Australia in 1995. Cloncurry-based rural doctor and now Rural Doctors Association of Queensland President, Dr Sheilagh Cronin, received the inaugural Peter Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award last year.

Dr Nola Maxfield, Dr Jeff Ayton and Dr Peter Rischbieth are available for interview.

A photo of Dr Rischbieth is also available.

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