

MEDIA RELEASE



Embargoed until 5am ADST, Friday 25 December 2009

*Embargoed interviews are available on the days prior to Christmas Day:
live interviews are available on Christmas Day*

Remember hardworking rural doctors this Christmas: rural doctor does 26th Christmas Day on-call

Hundreds of rural and remote doctors across Australia will be working on Christmas Day and across the festive season to provide healthcare to their communities who, without them, would have none.

RDAA President Dr Nola Maxfield, a rural doctor who is working on Boxing Day in the Victorian town of Wonthaggi, said Christmas is a good opportunity to remember the work of Australia's rural and remote doctors who provide high quality healthcare to rural communities around the country and around the clock, every day of the year.

"While most Australians sit down to enjoy their Christmas celebrations, it's worth bearing in mind that many rural and remote doctors, along with other rural health professionals, will be away from their families caring for the sick and injured," Dr Maxfield said.

"It may be Christmas, but emergencies don't stop and babies continue to be born. In rural and remote areas, many GPs provide emergency, obstetric, inpatient and procedural services at their local hospital—and unlike their city counterparts, they may be the only doctor available for hundreds of kilometres."

The committed rural doctor husband and wife team of Dr Paul Mara and Dr Virginia Wrice are located in NSW's iconic town of Gundagai. Dr Mara will be spending his 26th Christmas Day on-call this year.

Over the years, Dr Mara calculates he's spent more time with other people's children than his own on Christmas Day. This has included delivering a number of Christmas babies, attending car accidents of people travelling to family gatherings, and treating children after accidents with new bicycles and skateboards.

"You do it because there is no-one else to do it," Dr Mara explained. "Rural practice from our perspective is the most satisfying practice, but it is also the most demanding. What's required of rural practitioners is far beyond that of city doctors. What we require are more rural doctors."

Unfortunately, some rural and remote towns in Australia will not have emergency medical cover this Christmas—or around the year—as there are simply not enough rural doctors for the one-in-three Australians who live in the bush. At least 18,000 additional rural health professionals—including an additional 1700 rural doctors—are needed in rural and remote Australia to ensure access to the same level of even basic health services enjoyed in the cities.

"If we are going to have rural doctors available not just at Christmas but around the year, we need specific financial incentives and supports to encourage doctors to go bush and take up rural practice," Dr Maxfield said. "These supports should better recognise the relative isolation of rural practice and the additional on-call responsibilities—like working on a public holiday—as well as the procedural work such as obstetrics, anaesthetics and emergency care that is undertaken in rural and remote practice."

RDAA and the AMA have developed a Rural Rescue Package that, if implemented by the Federal Government, would go some way towards providing real incentives for more doctors to go rural and remote.

"RDAA will be working to achieve these incentives in 2010, along with better infrastructure supports and other support programs such as adequate locum services to assist in attracting and retaining rural health professionals," Dr Maxfield said. "Meanwhile, I'd like to wish everyone a happy Christmas and a healthy New Year."

Dr Paul Mara and Dr Nola Maxfield are available prior to Christmas Day for embargoed interviews.

Dr Paul Mara is available for interview from 9am ADST on Friday 25 December, on 0466 665 933.

Dr Nola Maxfield is available for interview from 9am ADST on Saturday 26 December, on 0418 335 344.