



Media release
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Attention: NSW / health / rural media

Innovative rural student named Medical Student of the Year 2009

A passion for promoting the benefits of rural practice to other health students has seen rural NSW medical student, Shannon Nott, receive the Westpac RDAA Medical Student of the Year Award for 2009.

The fourth year medical student from the University of New South Wales received the prestigious award at the Rural Doctors Association of Australia's and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine's *Rural Medicine Australia 2009* conference, held in Melbourne over the weekend.

Shannon received his award in large part for his significant efforts in establishing an innovative annual Rural Appreciation Weekend (RAW) for university health-stream students, which has been held on his family property at Dunedoo, 325 kilometres northwest of Sydney, since 2007.

The weekends have been Shannon's inventive way of introducing health students from all sectors of the profession to country life and, in doing so, inspiring them to take the next step towards a rural health career.

Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said Shannon deserved high praise for his initiative and motivation to help solve the huge problem of attracting and retaining doctors and other health professionals in the bush.

"We know that providing early, positive rural experiences are a critical way of encouraging medical students and other health students to work in rural and remote areas after graduation, where they are desperately needed" Dr Maxfield said. "Shannon has come up with a great way of doing just that.

"In the first year of RAW, Shannon invested his own money into making the weekend a success—and the investment has paid off. Since then, it has grown from involving 35 people from two university rural health clubs to this year attracting over 100 people from rural health clubs across Australia.

"Students stay on Shannon's family property, are given a tour of the farm by Shannon's father and brother, meet the local community at social events, take part in Indigenous cultural awareness sessions, listen to talks on rural health, get involved in team-building exercises and even meet a snake handler and watch sheepdog trials.

"The weekend shows the students the great lifestyle that rural practice can provide, and also the wide scope of practice that working as a rural health professional can provide. This type of experience is so essential in getting more medical students and health students to consider a future career in rural healthcare, and Shannon's efforts in organising such a great event—along with the other initiatives in which he is involved—make him very worthy of this Award."

RAW is just one of many events and roles that Shannon has managed to fit around his medical studies. Since beginning university, he has been actively involved in his rural health club, the Rural Allied Health and Medical Society (RAHMS), the National Rural Health Students' Network (NRHSN) and the Australian Medical Students' Association.

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“I’ve always been a relatively busy person and I enjoy keeping myself busy. I suppose for me it’s something I enjoy, but it’s also a way to give back. I got into medicine originally to give back” Shannon explained. “Things like this Award always come as a big surprise—you never expect to get anything as prestigious as this—so for me it is nice to see that what you’re doing does make a difference and that other people see that too.”

Shannon’s next challenge is to take up an elective in the Northern Territory or Kimberley region of Western Australia to work with remote communities and gain a first-hand insight into remote health conditions.

Looking further ahead, Shannon’s long-term plans are to settle in the bush somewhere, become a procedural GP and run a multi-professional clinic while also doing some medical outreach work to more remote areas.

Rural Health Workforce Australia’s National Program Manager, Kristen Harrison, and Director of Future Workforce, Louise Lawler, warmly congratulated Shannon on receiving the Award, saying: “Shannon has been an outstanding ambassador for rural and remote medicine and health in general. His commitment and dedication to the cause of equality in health for all Australians, on top of his normal study load, has been exemplary. Shannon is an outstanding leader who exemplifies the intrinsic rewards of medicine through his passion and incredible donation of time, effort and inspiration to make a difference. Through his honest, hard working and reliable approach, he has earned the deep respect of his peers and the communities he has worked with so closely. Shannon will be a valued asset to the health sector for years to come. The primary objective of NRHSN is to engender and empower students to be active participants in the journey forward for rural and remote health. Shannon has been the embodiment of this vision. Shannon’s work is a reassurance of the future for rural and remote health which gives us optimism and clarity for our purpose. It is true that ‘from little things, big things grow’ and with a leader like Shannon there is tremendous promise that all Australians will be able to access high quality, reliable healthcare in our future.”

Westpac’s Chief Executive, Commercial and Agribusiness, Graham Jennings, said Westpac was proud to support RDAA and its award winners in 2009.

“Westpac is delighted to support the recognition of dedicated individuals to improving rural and remote health and their outstanding achievements and commitment. As Australia’s oldest bank and first company we have seen over many years the importance of rural centres and how the essential services provided by rural doctors are an integral part of country communities. 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.”

Dr Nola Maxfield and Shannon Nott are available for interview.

A photo of Shannon is also available.

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