

**Media release
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Attention: NSW / health / rural media**

Tireless rural GP and trail blazer for female doctors named Rural Doctor of the Year 2009

A tireless doctor who has served her rural NSW community for 25 years, championed rural birthing services and Indigenous health, worked hard to recruit more doctors to the bush and blazed a path for rural female doctors has been named the Westpac RDAA Rural Doctor of the Year for 2009.

Moree GP obstetrician, Dr Maxine Percival, received the prestigious award at the Rural Doctors Association of Australia's and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine's national *Rural Medicine Australia 2009* conference, held in Melbourne over the weekend.

"Maxine deserves to be recognised for the tireless work she has undertaken in Moree for 25 years, providing general practice and obstetrics services to the people of this remote agricultural centre, and for breaking new ground for female doctors everywhere" Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said.

"She is an incredibly loyal and hardworking doctor who has worked doggedly for her local community, providing high quality healthcare in Moree through her meticulous approach to clinical care.

"Maxine has also given much of her own time to campaign strongly for improvements in rural health—most notably her advocacy following the UMP insurance collapse, her commitment to keeping rural birthing services open, and her involvement with helping to start the NSW Procedural GP Training Program—issues on which she has campaigned during her involvement over many years with RDAA and the Rural Doctors Association of NSW, as well as with other organisations.

"There are many women in Moree who are extremely grateful to Maxine for providing an obstetric service that's allowed them to give birth in their own community, and near their families and support systems, rather than being forced to make a three hour road trip to the next nearest birthing facility in Tamworth. Over the years Maxine has had to make a substantial personal commitment to regularly be on-call in order to continue to provide this service.

"By her own example Maxine also has broken new ground for fellow female rural doctors. She has faced professional and personal adversities in her life yet she has never failed in giving her all to the community, both as a great doctor and as an active campaigner on rural health issues.

"Not only has Maxine been an extremely dedicated doctor, she also has been a dedicated wife and mother.

"Few doctors have given the time, skill and commitment to a rural community that Maxine has and as such I am very pleased to see her awarded this extremely well-earned honour."

Dr Percival graduated from the University of Sydney with Honours in 1981. She completed her Diploma of Obstetrics at Tamworth Base Hospital in 1983 and then went on to complete her Family Medicine Program training in 1985 before moving to Moree. She also holds an FRACGP, FACRRM and DRANZCOG. As well as providing local general practice care, she is also a Visiting Medical Officer at Moree Hospital.

Dr Percival blazed a path for rural female doctors by becoming the first female Executive Member of the Rural Doctors Association of NSW and serving as Vice President from 2004 to 2005. She also made considerable strides with representative positions in a wide range of organisations including RDAA, the NSW General Practice Council and NSW Rural Doctors Network (including Chair from 2001 to 2002), as well as serving as Chair of Rural and Remote Medical Services Ltd from 2001 to 2004 and as a member of the NSW Procedural GP Training Program advisory committee.

On a personal level, life for a female full-time doctor in Moree in 1985 was sometimes a challenging environment. Dr Percival said some in the community “gave me stick” when she swapped roles with her husband and began working full-time while he stayed home with their children.

“I had a difficult start to practice in Moree but was lucky enough to have people around me who saw the potential I had and stuck with me” Dr Percival said.

In 1991 her family was struck by misfortune when her husband was diagnosed with a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and given 5 to 7 years prognosis. “This was a major wake-up call for us as a family” she said. Her husband recently celebrated his 18th anniversary since the diagnosis.

“I've had quite a bit of adversity over the years, but I have just had to keep going because I was the main breadwinner and my husband was ill or unable to find work” she said.

“Additionally, I have always believed that the skills I have developed during my medical training and subsequent years in practice should be used for the benefit of the community.”

In the 25 years that Dr Percival has been in Moree, she has supervised and taught large numbers of medical students and registrars. She also runs the medical practice which currently has a team of 15 people, and she has taken an active role in recruiting and retaining doctors in rural communities.

She is also committed to improving rural access to Indigenous health—Moree has the second highest Indigenous population in NSW outside Sydney—as well as women's health, mental health and rural maternity services.

“I really believe that patients in a large community like Moree, where we have 200 births a year, should be able to give birth in their own town” Dr Percival said. “You can't just put a labouring woman in the back of an ambulance, drive her three hours to Tamworth, and always expect her or her peers to get out at the other end without having had complications.”

She also added: “We badly need young Australian graduates who are committed to become rural doctors and who want to practise high quality medicine in a remote setting. Ultimately all rural doctors who commit themselves to this type of practice deserve this Award. I thank Westpac for sponsoring it.”

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 Dr Maxine Percival are available for interview.

A photo of Dr Percival is also available.

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