“Highly dedicated” NSW North Coast doctor named Rural Doctor of the Year

A “highly dedicated” rural doctor from Kempsey on the NSW North Coast has received the Rural Doctors Association of Australia’s (RDAA) Rural Doctor of the Year Award for 2017.

Dr Colin Farquharson has been recognised for his 30 years of service to the people of the Macleay Valley; his contribution to medical education as an active teacher of medical students and young doctors; his strong and ongoing advocacy on behalf of the rural medical profession; and his work to continue to maintain and expand hospital services in Kempsey.

He received the Award at a gala dinner for the Rural Medicine Australia 2017 conference, held in Melbourne on Friday night.

“Colin is very deserving of this prestigious Award” outgoing RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said.

“After moving to Australia from the UK and then graduating from Medicine at the University of Sydney at the relatively late age of 32, Colin took up posts at Wollongong Hospital; the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children in Camperdown, Sydney; and Katherine Hospital before working as a GP Obstetrician at Kempsey for an initial ten years.

"He then worked as an Obstetrics Registrar at John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle for a short period before returning to Kempsey in 1998 to work as a rural GP with Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) responsibilities in Obstetrics, Paediatrics and Rehabilitation Medicine at Kempsey Hospital.

"He has been in that role ever since.

"Along the way, his practice has broadened to include the local Aboriginal Medical Service and working as a doctor at the local Mid North Coast Correctional Centre.

"As the VMO for the Rehabilitation Unit at Kempsey Hospital, Colin has been largely responsible for its day-to-day processes and policies. This has been no small commitment both in time and anxiety. While he has never said so, rehabilitation is often an area of medicine that requires difficult discussions with patients and relatives.

"In all his work at the Hospital, Colin takes great pride in his part in keeping the Hospital going and is keen to see services expand to include more local specialists.

"Colin is also an active teacher of medical students and young doctors, and is an examiner for the Diploma of Obstetrics offered by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG).

"Like many long-term obstetricians, Colin is now caring for the grandchildren of his early patients. In his case, this has also included delivering the great-grandsons of one of his early colleagues.

"Colin exemplifies the quiet but dedicated style of many rural doctors. While he is an unassuming man and not one to grandstand, he remains passionate about Rural Medicine, his peers, his patients and his community, and he quietly but regularly lobbies politicians about the profession and in support of local health services.

"In all his work, Colin has relied on the wonderful support of his wife, Margot.

“We warmly congratulate Col on receiving this much-deserved Award.”

Dr Leo Smith, now a retired doctor, spoke on his experience of knowing Dr Farquharson for many years.
“I picture Colin strolling along in East Kempsey with his mildly manic border collie pulling on the lead, and Colin rustically attired in shorts and sartorial gum boots. We also see Colin in the Macleay Choir. He enjoys our recitals probably more for the fact that he is here involved with several elderly people in a fun activity that also serves the Valley.

“Col has a modest cottage on the beach where he and Margot make the most of what is arguably the best of the Macleay Valley. All are felt most welcome. Both their children, now adults, display an individuality and style reflecting their parents' preparedness to criticise popular norms and place importance on thought. Colin is a good man, and his work deserves recognition.”

**Dr Farquharson said rural medical practice had made for a wonderful career.**

“What got me interested in rural practice? Well, as an older graduate, I thought general practice at the time would be more interesting and challenging in a rural area, particularly after doing some time in the Northern Territory. You never know quite what is going to walk through the door. And I had heard positive stories from a relative about working in rural Australia” he said.

“I was bought up on the edge of a big city and went rural as I had never experienced this way of life.

“While there are of course the challenges of living and working as a doctor in the same small community, what is truly rewarding about rural practice — which can of course happen in city life too — is the wonderful interaction with patients.

“I have the cards and small occasional gifts that people, who cannot afford much, give you. Or the chokos, jam, cake or that gift you cannot buy, which is worth its weight in gold; that is what, on reflection, I find rewarding.

“And of course when it comes to rural obstetrics, there are highlights every year that keep me here, though they are often associated with challenging events like having to deal with the delivery of twins at 24 and 28 weeks’ gestation or having a complicated vaginal breech delivery in 2016."

Outside Medicine, Col says: “I enjoy walking our faithful 13 year old border collie, Cleopatra, of a morning; listening to music and singing not very well in the local choir; and I read a lot of history these days.

“I have always enjoyed going to watch films and seeing a really good comedian is a real joy.

“And I garden a lot, mainly because everything keeps growing”, before adding drily “My specialty is bindii cultivation.”

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A high resolution photo of Dr Farquharson is available by contacting Patrick Daley.

**Available for interview:**
Dr Colin Farquharson (via Patrick Daley)  
Outgoing RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee (via Patrick Daley and Ineke Kuiper)

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