

# Don't miss the cut for crucial rural health course

The door is about to close on this year's HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine unit being offered by the School of Medicine at Deakin University and the National Centre for Farmer Health, Hamilton.

And NCFH Director, Susan Brumby says "with only a few places left, interested rural and agricultural health professionals will need to register in the next few days to ensure their place in this high-profile course".

Clinical Associate Professor Brumby says the 5-day intensive course has been designed to develop the next generation of rural and agricultural health leaders to improve the health, safety and well-being of rural and remote Australians.

Associate Professor Brumby has also stressed the topics covered will suit more than graduate level students and professionals from nursing, medicine, health and agricultural science.

She says it will be "just as relevant and valuable to people in agribusiness, social work, veterinary and environmental science backgrounds".

Registered Division One nurse, Cindy Boyd, says for her the course has the potential to solve many of the challenges facing agricultural families in the Kerang district, where she is based.

An evening weekend nursing supervisor, Cindy's role covers a wide range of areas including management, midwifery, oncology, medical emergencies and teaching.

As someone off a family farm, married to a farmer and with children who are showing every sign of also wanting to stay on the farm, Cindy says providing adequate health services in rural regions is increasingly critical.

"I am actually taking this year off nursing to help focus on our farm, where we are running 1000 beef cattle, 800 Merinos and a cropping and hay program, but that doesn't alter the fact that there is a huge gap in rural health with a doctor shortage," Cindy says.

"By doing a course such as the HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine unit I will be in a better position to not only better equip myself professionally, it will also enable me to help my community on a day-to-day basis," she says.

"Our doctor shortage is not going to solve itself overnight and I am also considering doing a nurse practitioner course next year when I am back in nursing as that will enable me to deliver a lot more health services."

Castlemaine-based Steve Duffy, a scholarship participant in the HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine unit, says he believes the health issues affecting his local rural community “are extreme”.

Steve says with years of negative seasonal and economic impacts battering agricultural Australia, many individuals, families, generations and communities have been affected.

“It is encouraging to see an overdue injection of funding to assist with rural mental health funding as this is an area which includes huge increases in depression, anxiety and suicide rates,” he says.

“So as a well-trained, agricultural health and safety professional I am always looking to be better equipped to assist community awareness and behaviour change around the signs and symptoms of illness across the life span.

“By taking part in the HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine unit, I will be getting the skills to engage with the communities and assisting its ability to meet its needs and develop as many local solutions as possible.”

Associate Professor Brumby says the most important aspect of a productive agricultural industry is a healthy workforce.

She says through the HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine unit participants will learn about the poor health on the ‘other side of the fence’ and its impact on agribusiness, agricultural production and sustainability and thereby help to improve the health outcomes of farming men, women and children.

“You will increase your understanding of the social, environmental, physical and mental health factors that result in higher rates of injury, illness and death in rural and remote communities,” she says.

“This information will be beneficial to everyone looking to improve agricultural production and sustainability or to improve health provision, research, policy and literacy in rural and remote communities.

“Positive feedback from students who have attended previous units has been overwhelming, with comments such as ‘inspired me with new ideas to take back to my workplace and the community’ commonplace.”

Applications for the HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine unit close in early February, or when the course reaches capacity.

Further details are available from <http://www.farmerhealth.org.au/page/what-hmf701>  
or contact us on (03) 5551 8533 or email [ncfh@wdhs.net](mailto:ncfh@wdhs.net)